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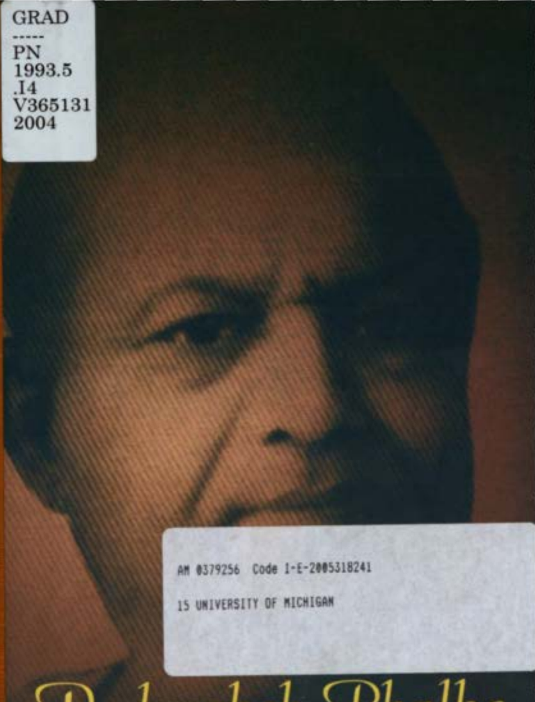

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Dadasaheb Phalke

The Father of Indian Cinema

BAPU WATVE

Translated by S. A. Virkar

DADASAHEB PHALKE
The Father of Indian Cinema

National Biography

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S. A. VIRKAR

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1

INITIAL ATTEMPTS TO CREATE MOVING PICTURES

Cinema is a creative medium combining art and technology. It is a powerful means of entertainment and education of the masses. This complex art, which depicts life through moving and singing images, is an offspring of photography and technical skill.

Inventors in America, Britain, Germany and France were experimenting with moving pictures for a number of years. In 1640, Zeus Kirkhar of Rome achieved some success, but there was no further progress. In the nineteenth century, the research in this regard received good momentum. George Eastman, an imaginative man of New York, invented in 1889 the photographic film used today. Thereafter British inventor William Friese Greene made a camera, which could use the film for moving pictures. He made considerable progress in moving the pictures and in projecting them on a screen. He is, therefore, regarded as the father of cinema. The same year, a French inventor, L.A.A. Prince, also developed a camera. By coincidence, it was the same year that Thomas Edison developed two machines, the kinetoscope and the kinetograph. The former could be used for filming while with the latter, one could see the pictures moving, by using a lever. These films were, of course, of a few seconds' duration. The machines were installed in shops and were, therefore, known as 'shop show', 'peep show', 'store show' or 'nickelodeon'.

The year 1889 is an important one in the history of cinema. It was in this year that in India, a versatile engineer of Mumbai, Maadanrao Madhavrao Chitale, painted some events from the life of Shrikrishna on slides. With the aid of a magic lantern, he showed them to audiences for fun. It created an impression of seeing a movie. Then Mahadeo Gopal Patwardhan of Kalyan thought that this could become a business and obtained an old magic lantern. His elder son Vinayak studied drawing and painting at the J. J. School of Art and made himself adept in both the skills of painting pictures on glass and creating a make-believe movie by using a magic lantern. He made a magic lantern at home using lamps like those used at railway stations or by high-ranking government officers.

The Patwardhan father and son duo got an early opportunity to present their newly acquired art to an audience. They called their show *Shambarik Kharolika* and explained the meaning of this strange-sounding, seemingly difficult name thus:

> *Shambarik* means magic and *kharolika* means a lantern. 'Magi' means *shambarasur*, from which we derived a concise word shambarik. The Marathi words for lantern are 'deep' and 'diva'. They are, however, worn out by too much use. So, we discovered the word 'kharolika' for it from 'Amarkosh' (a thesaurus) as an alternative word and gave currency to the expression *'Shambarik Kharolika'* for 'Magic Lantern'.

"Why should we need an English word at all?" he would say. A detailed description of their show is found in Prabodhankar Thakaray's autobiography, *Mazi Jeevengatha* (The Saga of My Life).

Along with Vinayakrao, his younger brother Ramchandra too became an expert in both the jobs. To encourage their new art, many people from Mumbai's high society got them to hold shows of *Shambarik Kharolika* in their homes. As the shows became popular, they got invitations to hold special shows for seeing the events in the life of Shrikrishna depicted by them. Due to the huge response received by them at different places in Ganesh festivals, the interest and enthusiasm of the Patwardhan father and sons increased many fold and they started holding stage shows of *Shambarik Kharolika* in theatres by sale of tickets. The price of tickets ranged from one anna to four annas.

Deciding to make a profession of these shows, the Patwardhan father and sons went all out in their efforts. Both the brothers had scored high marks at the matriculation examination. Rambhau had mastery over English. It was decided that one of them would continue with his service in the railways and the other would concentrate all his attention on *Shambarik Kharolika*. Vinayakrao painted on slides a story with the backdrop of a circus. Pleased that the Patwardhans had depicted on a screen a circus like their own, Kashinathpant and Vishnupant Chhatre, the two proprietors of Chhatre's Grand Circus, gave financial assistance to the Patwardhans in appreciation of the indigenous art. The Patwardhan Brothers used for their slides the paintings of the well-known painters Ravi Verma and Madhavrao Dhurandhar.

To make the movements and the acting on the screen more effective, the Patwardhans conceived the idea of using three magic lanterns instead of one. Two of them were used for showing movements and acting and the third for depicting the background décor such as forests, gardens, roads, rivers, palaces, clouds, mountains etc. This trick was wholly successful as they achieved the desired effect on the screen. A ten-foot long and ten-foot wide wet piece of cloth was used as a screen. Whenever the number of viewers increased, some of them would be seated on the other side of the screen too. According to a recorded estimate, the number of viewers had gone up to one thousand.

The show would begin with the appearance of an artistic board reading: "Welcome —Patwardhan Brothers, *Shambarik Kharolika*". A compere flanked on two sides by two *tambora*-wielding singers followed the 'Welcome' sign, as per the conventions of the period. The Patwardhan Brothers would handle the magic lanterns with such finesse that the action of the singers fingering the wires of the *tambora* and that of the compere greeting the audience appeared very real. Showing the movements of lips and fingers accurately in appropriate places required real skill.

After the invocation by the compere, the singers would depart and the next scene would show the compere inviting his female counterpart, the *Nati*. Her movements were like a dancer's. The Patwardhan Brothers had acquired such mastery over handling the magic lanterns that the movements of the *Nati* appeared quite genuine as in a moving picture. As the Patwardhan Brothers' paintings were true to scale, clear-cut and attractive, the scenes were very beautiful to look at.

The invocation would be followed by the story. It was generally mythological. Once in a while, it would be of an adventure too. Because of their good success in the business, the Patwardhans undertook a running tour of Maharashtra and Gujarat and ended it on 27th December 1895 at the 11th session of the National Congress held in Pune. They held a show of *Shambarik Kharolika* for Lokmanya Tilak, Justice Ranade, the Hon. Mr Gokhale, and Congress President Surendranath Bannerjee who acclaimed it. They also organised shows at the Anandodbhawan theatre in Budhwar Chowk of Pune by sale of tickets and the audience admired them to no end. The earnings too were huge. Mahadeo Gopal Patwardhan died in 1902. About the same time the Patwardhan Brothers had filmed three movies: *Seeta Swayamvar, Raja Harishchandra* and *Ramrajya Abhishek*.

In order to show movements, three small pictures were painted on a four-inch glass slide. It took three to four days to paint one picture. An adequate number of such slides would make up a story in pictures. The Patwardhan Brothers would be so engrossed in the complicated work of painting the pictures that they were oblivious of hunger and thirst.

The Patwardhan Brothers also obtained the services of renowned authors to write running commentaries appropriate to the various movies to make them more appealing and entertaining to the audience. Not only that, they added music to their shows. Being good connoisseurs of music, the Patwardhan Brothers were able to play *tabla* and harmonium. For some episodes they also got written dialogues and songs for which they got a lot of help from *Kirtankar* Joshi, a teacher by profession. The songs described the scenes. Their outfit included children with melodious voice to sing the songs, sitting by the side of the screen.

In one scene from the life of Shrikrishna, Vasudeo carries the baby Shrikrishna over his head across a river. The river parts but the water goes on rising. But, as it touches the feet of the baby, its level recedes rapidly. The scene, which was contrived with slides, dumbstruck the audience. In 1958, the audiences admired the scene from the movie *Ten Commandments* in which the sea parts to allow chariots to run through it. The success of Patwardhan Brothers in achieving the same effect about 65 years earlier deserves to be admired.

Many foreigners endorsed the view that the Patwardhan Brothers' amazing art of creating an illusion of a movie from a hand-painted story on four-inch glass slides was unprecedented not only in India but the world over. Some of those laudatory references are still available. Mr Jackson, Collector of Nashik, was murdered in the second week of May 1909. He had witnessed the *Shambarik Kharolika* show only the previous day. His letter of appreciation is also among other such commendations. In the matrix of even a mythological story, the Patwardhan

Brothers wove a strand of nationalism very suggestively.

The idea underlying *Shambarik Kharolika* was that of a cartoon and eighteen years after *Shambarik Kharolika*, that is, in 1908, the first cartoon film was produced in America. It was *Phantasmagoria* by Emil Cole. Its length was 12 feet.

In 1895, in America, Edison invented 'Vitascope', a machine to enable more than one person to view a movie. It made it possible for a gathering of people to see a movie for about a half or three quarters of a minute, on a white piece of cloth hung up on a wall or a piece of string.

In France, Lumiere Brothers too were busy experimenting on these lines. They made two machines, one for filming and the other for projecting the film. After being satisfied about their efficiency, they filmed a 20-second event and held a private showing of it for half a minute on 28th March 1895. The audience was wonderstruck as the pictures showed the actual movement of characters. The name of this tiny movie was *Lunch Hour at the Lumiere Factory*. Encouraged by the audience response, the Lumiere Brothers produced a 50-ft. movie named *Charge of the Dragon* and, on Christmas Day, 25th December 1895, exhibited it at the Grand Cafe House in Paris by sale of tickets. This was the first film show in the world! The audience count was 35 on the first day. The number went on swelling to reach the 2,000 mark. The Lumiere Brothers were then convinced that this business was going to be very profitable. They quickly produced many short films and sent their representatives to many countries to hold shows. One of their representatives came to India. He held his first show on 7th July 1896 at Watson Hotel, which stood where the Esplanade Mansion now stands near Kalaghoda in Mumbai. The show included some short films like *Arrival of a Train*, etc. Its advertisement in *The Times of India* ran like this: 'See an astounding discovery of this century, the greatest wonder of the world, the movements of life-size living images'. The tickets were priced at

Re 1.00. It was rather costly in those days, but moving pictures was a novelty, which created tremendous curiosity. The first day attracted two hundred viewers. A funny thing happened that day. As their eyes were not used to looking at moving pictures, seeing that the railway engine on the screen was closing in on them, some viewers ran outside the hotel while some others hid themselves behind chairs!

The shows in Watson Hotel continued for a week. Thereafter, from 14th July to 15th August, they were held in the then Novelty Theatre, which was housed in a shed, where 'The Excelsior' now stands. Although it was rainy season in full swing and the tickets ranged from eight annas to two rupees, they were house-full shows. That was the extent of people's attraction for these small, moving pictures.

What were these moving pictures like? The duration of every movie was a minute or a minute and a half. A show comprised 12 such movies. Scenes such as a child playing in a garden, her having breakfast with her parents, a horse running about, labourers building a wall, workers leaving their factory, a boatman rowing his boat, a train entering a station, waves tossing on the sea, dry leaves flying in the wind, a boy playing mischief with a gardener watering a garden and the latter running to catch him—such were the subjects of these short flicks. There were neither artists, nor sets. It was all location shooting. The whole show would last for fifteen to twenty minutes, but the audience was spellbound by the movement of the images. Being in Baroda (Vadodara) at the time, Dadasaheb Phalke had not seen these movies.

2

EXPERIMENTS WITH MOVIES IN INDIA

The shows held at the Watson Hotel by Lumiere Brothers' representative were seen by Harischandra Sakharam Bhatavdekar alias Savedada of Mumbai. He was so impressed that he started thinking of producing a movie himself and obtained an agency of Lumiere Brothers' machinery. Having had to explain its operation to his customers, he became somewhat knowledgeable about its use. He had a shop of photographic goods at Kennedy Bridge.

After making up his mind to produce a movie, Savedada ordered a cine-camera from London. On receiving it, he acquired the necessary technical know-how and filmed a wrestling bout of Pundalikdada and Krishna Nhavi at the Hanging Gardens of Mumbai. After getting it processed abroad, he screened the short film in 1899 at the Pari theatre, charging Rs 3.00 for a ticket. Even so, there were huge crowds to watch it. Thus Savedada became the pioneer of Indian movies. He thereafter produced short films about monkeys, street acrobats etc.

When in 1901, Wrangler R. P. Paranjpe returned from abroad after obtaining his degree, it was Savedada who made a documentary of his arrival and felicitation ceremony. This was the first documentary film produced in India. Coming to know of Savedada's success, Hiralal Sen and Jyotish Sarkar of Calcutta (now Kolkata) started making movies. An account of Hiralal Sen's attempts was published in the 1939 issue of *Deepali* of Calcutta. Sen had bought a projector back in 1896. In 1900, a photographer of the Pathe Company had been to India from whom Sen took lessons in photography. In a short while he made a cine-camera himself and filmed a dancing sequence of Narendranath Bannerjee and Kusumkumari from the renowned play *Alibaba* in 1903. The same year, Savedada filmed the *Darbar* of (the court held by) Emperor Edward at Delhi.

In 1905, Jyotish Sarkar filmed the mammoth demonstrations held in Calcutta under the leadership of Surendranath Bannerjee to protest the partition of Bengal. This documentary was shown at the Coronation Theatre. However, as the anti-British sentiments rose, the British government banned the show. Later, Jyotish Sarkar tried to produce a film named *Bilwamangal* with financial help from J. F. Maadan who had made a big name as a film exhibitor, distributor and producer. However, Maadan stopped financial help and the film remained incomplete. Later, Devi Ghosh, who had produced short films for Aurora Film Company, offered some financial help, but it was not enough to complete the film and whatever shooting was done remained in the tins.

J.F. Maadan too made documentaries. He filmed whatever he could of the 1905 movement against the partition of Bengal. He also filmed Lokmanya Tilak's visit to Calcutta in 1906 and the huge procession in which he was taken around. His other documentaries included the great flood of Hyderabad in 1908, George and Mary's visit to Mumbai, the devastating fire in a cotton godown, the Delhi *Darbar* and so on. Savedada had also produced short films such as the entry of a train in the Bori Bunder station, horse races etc. Thanawala, an amateur photographer, had filmed *Taboot* processions. Other amateurs too had made short movies.

The first Indian movie with a running story was screened in 1912. There was an amateurs' drama company called Shreepad Sangeet Natak Mandali in Girgaon. They came to know Ramchandra Gopal alias Dadasaheb Torne of Malwan, who worked as a salesman in the electrical department of Greaves Cotton Company in Mumbai. An idea was mooted that the performance of a play be filmed. This was in 1906-07, but as the *Shreepad Natak Mandali* lacked the capital and the essential technical knowledge for producing a movie, three years went by.

Nanabhai Chitre, General Manager of the eveninger *Advocate of India*, was a friend of Dadasaheb Torne, who spoke to Chitre about this idea. Chitre came to know that M/s Borne & Shepherd Co. had a cine-camera, and went there personally. As the company agreed to provide a Williamson camera, raw film and their photographer on a payment of Rs 1,000, much of the problem was solved. Filming began in 1909 in Mangaldas Wadi in Mumbai where the Naaz Theatre now stands. The play *Pundalik* was selected for the purpose of filming. The director was, naturally, Dadasaheb Torne himself. The actors and actresses would take entry and exit as in a stage play and do acting in front of the camera, which was fixed in one place.

The filming was over in due course and then *Pundalik* was sent abroad for processing. This first Indian silent movie with a story had to wait till 1912 for being screened. In the meantime, Nanasaheb Chitre's Coronation Theatre came up on Sandhurst Road where the Parekh Hospital now stands. *Pundalik* was screened there on 18th May 1912. In those days, there was a change of movie in the middle of a week, but *Pundalik* went on for two weeks. The response of the audience was very good. However, as there were no film distributors in those days, *Pundalik* was screened only in Mumbai. It did not, therefore, get adequate publicity. Besides, except for the novelty of it, there was nothing else worth mentioning. There was no film technique. It was simply the filming of a stage play. The technicians were foreign and the processing and printing were got done in

London. As a result, instead of Dadasaheb (Torne) getting the honour of being named the Father of Indian Film Industry, it went to the other Dadasaheb, i.e. Dhundiraj Govind alias Dadasaheb Phalke of Triambakeshwar. *Pundalik* was soon forgotten.

Savedada had decided to produce a film on the life of Shrikrishna and was also making preparations for the purpose. However, the death of his colleague and brother depressed him. He gave up the idea of film production, and sold the camera for Rs 750 to his technician friends A.P. Karandikar and V.P. Divekar. Of this duo, Bapurao Karandikar had studied art for three years, like Dadasaheb Phalke, at the Kala Bhavan of Baroda. He had also worked for some time in Shri Phalke's Laxmi Art Printing Works in Mumbai. A technician S.N. Patankar too joined the duo as a partner and the three of them decided to produce a film. This too happened in 1912. They selected the mythological story of 'Savitri' for their film, which, however, had many technical errors. Something went awry with film processing as well. Consequently, this film too went the way of *Bilwamangal*. It was never screened.

Notwithstanding the financial loss, the trio did not give up but continued their efforts. A rich man offered them a capital of Rs 15,000. Selecting the episode of Vyas and Jaimini from the *Bhagawat*, they produced a short film called *Passion versus Learning*. Divekar acted the part of Vyas whereas Keshavrao Gokhale, renowned stage artist, acted the part of Jaimini. In the days when it was impossible to get a lady artiste for acting on the stage, they had the services of Narmada Mande, a beautiful young lady of Ahmedabad.

This short movie was properly made. Its screening brought them more capital. It was then that Patankar and Company really came into being. In 1915, the trio produced a silent movie called *The Death of Narayanrao Peshawe*, of 6,000 ft. length with financial assistance from Chaturbhai and Dharamdas. By the grace of the Prince of Bhor (Shreemant Shankar Chimnaji Pantasachiv) not only was his palace made available for filming the silent movie, but also his peons for the army in the movie. The Pantasachiv was thus the first Indian Prince to lend a hand to the Indian film industry.

The issue of *Dnyanprakash* dated 12th November 1915 contained an article praising this movie. A humorous short movie named *Kalpavriksha* was shown along with it. Besides various games of Maharashtrian girls such as *Phugdi, Zimma, Saagargote, Pinga,* were also shown, which were very much liked by the female audience. The show, packed to the full with so many items, was first held at the Aryan Cinema in Pune.

Both these silent movies earned a lot of money which helped pay off all the debt. Subsequently they found a new creditor and floated a company called 'Patankar Friends & Company'. This company's first silent movie was *Bhakt Prahlad*, a mythological one produced in 1918. Then Patankar quit the company and one Dwarkadas Narayandas Sampat joined Karandikar and Divekar and formed Kohinoor Company. It produced two mythological silent movies: *Sati Parvati* and *Krishna-Sudama*.

The most invaluable work of Karandikar and Divekar was their filming of the funeral procession of Lokmanya Tilak! The whole of Mumbai was under a thick pal of gloom due to Lokmanya's death. A vast multitude of people had gathered in front of Sardar Gruha. All activity had come to a standstill. No conveyance was available. Karandikar and Divekar went on foot from Sardar Gruha to Chowpaty, carrying the camera and other material themselves and doing the filming all the way. Punjab-Kesari Lala Lajpatrai and Sarojini Naidu paid their last respects just before the pyre was lit. It was also filmed.

Lokmanya's ashes were taken to Pune and carried in a procession from the railway station to Gaikwad Wada. The duo filmed not only the procession but also the printing press of *Kesari*, the trophies presented to honour Lokmanya from time to time and even the easy chair and the folding table he used. This documentary was screened in the Majestic Cinema of Mumbai and the Aryan Cinema of Pune the same day, that is, 7th August 1920. The audience watched it most keenly and devoutly. Unfortunately, no copy of it is available today. All these movies (with the exception of *Pundalik*) were, of course, screened after Dadasaheb started his productions

Dhundiraj Govind *alias* Dadasaheb Phalke was born on 30th April 1870 (Saka 1892, Falgun vadya 14, according to the Hindu calendar) at 8:30 p.m. at Triambakeshwar, a holy place 29 km from Nashik. His father's name was Govind Sadashiv *alias* Dajishastri and mother's was Dwarkabai. *Vedashastrasampanna* (well-versed in the Vedas) Dajishastri worked as a priest conducting religious ceremonies in Triambakeshwar. As Dajishastri worked also as a *Puranik* (one who conducts religious discourses) in the temple, by constant association with him Dadasaheb knew how to conduct religious rituals like a *yajna* and dispensing of medicine. He also knew by heart *Mahabharata, Ramayana, Bhagwata, the Vedas and the Upanishads.* Thus from childhood he grew up in a holy ambience.

Including Dadasaheb, they were seven siblings. Shivrampant, the eldest, was twelve years older than Dadasaheb and worked in Baroda. For some time he was the *Dewan* (Chief Administrator) of the princely state of Jawhar. He was well-versed in homeopathy. He gave his patients free medicines of the Roy Company of Mumbai. He died in 1921 at the age of 63.

Dadasaheb's second brother Raghunathrao worked as a priest, but died very prematurely at a young age of 21. Of his four sisters, there is record of only one having been married into a Patwardhan family of Baroda.

As Dajishastri was a great Sanskrit scholar, he got an appointment as a professor of Sanskrit in the Wilson College of Mumbai. This brought the family to Mumbai. Although Dadasaheb's primary education was over in Triambakeshwar, his education up to matriculation was completed in Mumbai.

Dajishastri wanted Dadasaheb to be a Sanskrit scholar and become a professor like him. From his childhood, however, Dadasaheb had a liking for drawing and he had an innate gift too of that art. He made 'rangoli' during Diwali and at weddings and thread-ceremonies, and made artistic decorations for Ganesh-Gauri festivals with great enthusiasm. Later, he started sculpting very alluring Ganesh idols too. Considering his love of art and prowess therein, Dajishastri granted Dadasaheb's wish to join the J. J. School of Art at Mumbai in 1885. He did a part, for the first time, in the play staged at the social gathering of the J. J. School. In some other plays too he did excellent roles as an amateur artist. He completed a one-year course in drawing at the J. J. School of Art. No other details of his boyhood are available.

3

DEVELOPMENT OF ART AND RESOLVE TO PRODUCE INDIGENOUS MOVIES

After completion of his course at the J.J. School of Art, Dadasaheb's eldest brother Shivrampant Phalke took him to Baroda (Vadodar a) at the beginning of 1886 and put him in the famous Kala Bhavan so that he may develop his art further.

Dadasaheb made real progress in the various arts necessary for movie-making during his stay at Baroda. He had no thought at that time of making movies. Shivrampant worked at Baroda in the office of Rameshchandra Dutt, a Bengali gentleman, and he too was intelligent, analytical, with a literary bent of mind. Due to his association with Rameshchandra, he knew the Bengali language well. He not only spoke Bengali but could also write it. In addition to his Marathi writings, he started writing in Bengali too. Shivrampant Phalke first translated the Bengali novel *Durgesh Nandini* into Marathi. Later, he also translated *Subhadra Arjun*. Dadasaheb must have turned to writing in Marathi due to his elder brother's influence.

In 1886, Dadasaheb was married to a girl from a 'Marathe' family. In 1890, he completed a course in oil and water colour painting. Painting nature scenes became a hobby with him. He became proficient in architecture and modelling too. He bought a film camera that year and then started experimenting with photography, processing and printing, learning by trial and error. He made such a fine model of an ideal theatre that at the Industrial Exhibition of 1892 at Ahmedabad, he was awarded a gold medal for it. For his prowess in other art forms, he earned gold and silver medals from time to time. One fan of his presented to him a costly camera for still photography. As a result, he started spending considerable time in taking pictures, and processing and printing them.

Principal Gajjar of the Kala Bhavan took a liking for Dadasaheb and gave him permission in 1893 to use the photo studio and laboratory of Kala Bhavan. As a result Dadasaheb started spending days together in this work. Often, he worked until late at night in the laboratory. The work of 'Shri Phalke's Engraving and Photo Printing' was of such a high standard that a foreign photographer, Mr Rerhe, alone was capable of holding a candle to him. Foreigners admired the artistry and ingenuity of his photographs and prints.

About the same time, the Baroda College decided to stage the Sanskrit play *'Veni Sanhar'*. The responsibility of staging it was assigned to Dadasaheb. He not only acquainted himself with the task of teaching acting to the artists, getting them to deliver their pieces effectively, getting their make-up done well, but also did the job of prompting. The performance was much appreciated. He had already done a part in the play staged at the social gathering of the J.J. School of Art while studying there.

Earlier in 1981 Principal Gajjar had introduced Dadasaheb to the then popular Chief Justice Baburao Pandurang Walawalkar. With the encouragement of Principal Gajjar and under proper and discreet guidance of Justice Walawalkar, Dadasaheb learnt in about six months the technique of preparing half-tone blocks, photo-litho, three-colour ceramic photography, etc. He was very fond of learning new arts. As his grasping power was of a very high order, he could become proficient in any skill in a very short time. His idea in learning many trades was to be properly equipped if ever he had to undertake a supplementary source of livelihood. For acquiring the knowledge of new skills and for his business he had constantly to go on tours. He did not, therefore, have a stable family life. He studied classical music in the Maulabax Music School at Baroda and later performed *Kirtans* too, which combined the arts of music, acting and telling a story interestingly.

Despite the acquisition of various arts, Dadasaheb had no easy ride in making a living. He, therefore, decided to become a professional photographer. Handing over the photo studio and the laboratory of the Kala Bhavan to Principal Gajjar, he left for Godhra in Gujarat for doing business. It was 1895.

His business did not, however, do well at Godhra. A myth had spread all around that a camera sucks up energy from a person's body and the person dies soon afterwards. This had an adverse effect on Dadasaheb's business, which hardly made both ends meet. To add to his cup of woes, he lost his wife in the plague of Godhra in 1900. Naturally, it was a great blow to him. As he did not like to continue in Godhra, he returned to Baroda.

At Baroda, he restarted his photography business. He did not earn enough to make a living and so started the business of painting the stage curtains for drama companies. This led to his getting acquainted with Prof. Shankar Moreshwar Ranade, a knowledgeable person in the field of drama. He acquainted Dadasaheb with full details of the dramatic art and drama production. In short, he gave Dadasaheb the basic training in stage production. Not only that, he also gave Dadasaheb the hero's role in Shakespeare's plays *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline* and got him to do the roles properly.

When acting in plays, Dadasaheb very carefully observed how make-up and costume were done. He would discuss the subject with the make-up man. Later, he started doing the make-up for children's plays according to his own ideas. He achieved mastery in this art as well. Many guardians of the children said that Dadasaheb transformed their wards so completely that they could not recognise them.

Prof. Ranade had trained Dadasaheb in facial expression, movements on the stage and delivery of dialogues. He gradually began giving this training to amateur artists. If an artist failed to turn up for a show, Dadasaheb would often tide over the difficulty by doing the absentee's role himself. If a producer so requested, he would sometimes direct his play, write a play or make changes in the script as desired. He would also assist in stage settings.

To facilitate the training of new artistes in acting, he had thoughtfully displayed in his studio, photographs of artistes in foreign films showing their varied facial expressions. Many amateur artistes visited his studio to see these photographs. It was at this time that he presented the Sanskrit play *Veni Sanhaar* referred to earlier.

Even so, Dadasaheb was not able to establish himself. Once when he was in a depressed mood, a German magician arrived in Baroda. Dadasaheb had always an urge to learn new arts; so he got introduced to this magician. They became friends. Dadasaheb learned from him various items of magic based on chemical reactions, technical ideas, illusions, playing card tricks etc. This helped him later in trick photography in his film-making. Towards the end of 1901 Dadasaheb began to hold public shows of magic as Prof. Kelfa (letters of his name in reverse order in Marathi) and became very popular as a magician.

After he started film production, he filmed his magic shows. His daughter Mai (Mandakini) Athavle remembers an incident about his magic shows. Once when going to Mumbai by railway, the train halted for quite some time in the Khandala *ghat* due to some technical flaw. As there was no indication of the train resuming its journey soon, Dadasaheb obtained a pack of playing cards from a passenger and entertained the travelling public with playing card tricks. In 1902, Dadasaheb remarried at Baroda to Saraswati, daughter of Shankar Vasudeo Karandikar and niece of the proprietor of Kirloskar Natak Company and renowned singer-actor Bhaurao Kolhatkar (*alias* Bhavdya). This marriage proved to be propitious for Dadasaheb. Saraswatibai stood by him like a shadow all the time with a smiling face during the period he had to face many difficulties and ordeals in his great work of producing movies indigenously in India for the first time. She even actively helped him in his work. Her sacrifice was unprecedented.

The year after his marriage, with the encouragement and active help of an influential person like Dr. Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, Dadasaheb got a job as a photographer and draftsman in the Archaeological Survey department of the government. This job took him to all parts of India, which too benefited him in the long run. He could study the ancient splendour and architecture of India through an artist's eye. He thoughtfully photographed many temples, rock carvings, riverside *ghats,* astounding stone-carvings etc.

Notwithstanding all this interesting work, Dadasaheb's artistic mind did not find the job engaging enough. Besides, Dadasaheb's patriotism was boundless. The movement against the partition of Bengal had a great effect on him. As a result, he resigned from the secure government job in 1906 and his self-respecting, idealistic mind was obsessed with the thought of an independent industrial vocation.

Dadasaheb gave up the job for the sake of patriotism, but what next? He decided to go into an independent vocation. Dr. Bhandarkar already loved the highly intelligent Phalke. He was ever willing to help the versatile Dadasaheb. With his active assistance Dadasaheb set up a printing press at Lonavla under the name and style of 'Phalke Engraving and Printing Works'. The knowledge required for this profession, which he had obtained fifteen years earlier, was now useful to him.

Dadasaheb first secured the job of making photo-litho transfers for the Ravi Verma Press of Lonavla. Thereafter, he started the work of half-tone block making and printing. The newspaper *Rashtramat* published in its supplement photographs of great men like Lokmanya Tilak. These risky jobs were assigned to Dadasaheb who dared to make blocks and print photographs of revolutionaries and national leaders and was not afraid of the police inquiries that took place now and then. He now turned his attention to tri-colour printing.

This new business of Phalke was on the way up. Consequently, Phalke Engraving and Printing Works was shifted from Lonavla to Dadar Main Road for the sake of convenience. As his elder brother was the Dewan of Jawhar State, he persuaded the Prince to grant two thousand rupees for developing the business. Dadasaheb's ambition was to make his tri-colour printing most up to date. A rich merchant named Purushottam Vishram Mavji agreed to give necessary assistance for this purpose to Dadasaheb who had discussed the matter with Dr. Bhandarkar earlier. He generously and willingly agreed to give up his partnership in Phalke Engraving and Printing Works, as he did not want to come in the way of progress of an ambitious artist like Dadasaheb. The two business partners parted company, keeping their close relationship intact. Purushottam Mavji took the place of Dr. Bhandarkar as a partner.

The new printing press was named 'Laxmi Art Printing Works'. In order to obtain the technical know-how of colour printing and to buy the necessary machinery for it, Dadasaheb went to Germany in 1909. After completing the study and buying the machinery, he returned to India. According to the prevalent social mores, Dadasaheb had to undergo a purification ceremony, having returned from a foreign country. Dadasaheb's knowledge of coloured printing was so perfect and his printing so beautiful that the work of colour printing at the Laxmi Art Printing Works went on increasing and the business prospered. Only the Times of India Press could do colour printing as attractive as Dadasaheb's, which shows what degree of proficiency he had achieved in this art. The periodicals *American Painter* and *British Painter* admired Dadasaheb's printing a great deal.

Dadasaheb never felt at ease until whatever he undertook, was done to his entire satisfaction. He constantly thought about it, was obsessed by it. To work for it untiringly was part of his nature. He constantly tried to make his printing artistic, outstanding and attractive, worked day and night for it, but the overwork put a tremendous strain on his eyes and, gradually, his sight was affected. However, he was not prepared to rest which resulted in his losing his sight altogether.

Fortunately, a renowned ophthalmologist Dr. Prabhakar started emergency treatment for his eyes. It was efficacious. Dadasaheb's eye sight went on improving and was completely restored. At the same time, Dr. Prabhakar advised him not to do any work in future, which would strain his eyes, because if the sight were to be affected again, it would be very difficult to cure him. Dadasaheb agreed, for the time being at least.

Dadasaheb had also started publication of a pictorial magazine with an artistic get-up, in both Marathi and Gujarati. He loved gardening and was knowledgeable in that field too. He tried to maintain a clean and beautiful garden.

'Laxmi Art Printing Works' made a very good name for itself. Its work was appreciated all round, but some evil eye fell on it. Differences developed between the business-minded partner Mavji and the artistic Dadasaheb. More and more interference began to take place in Dadasaheb's ideas and plans. This was not likely to be stomached by a free-spirited man like Dadasaheb. As a result, at the beginning of 1911, he abruptly left 'Laxmi Art Printing Works' without taking a *paisa*.

As the word got around that Dadasaheb had left 'Laxmi Art Printing Works', many Gujarati financiers started knocking at his door. Finding that he did not talk about the matter, they approached Saraswatibai and said, "Sister, what does it matter if he has lost Laxmi Art Printing Works. We shall have Saraswati Art Printing Works instead." Dadasaheb was such a large-hearted man that while leaving 'Laxmi Art Printing Works', he had promised Mavjiseth that he would not turn to this business again. This had buoyed up Mavjiseth. Dadasaheb apprised the Gujarati financiers of his promise.

This queer, quixotic behaviour of Dadasaheb enraged his family and well-wishers. He was even questioned openly: "Kicking the goddess of wealth who came to your door in the shape of big financiers, which other occupation are you going to find to gain fame and fortune?" He had no answer. He had severed the partnership abruptly, without any plans for the future. He felt frustrated. This was his test by fire and the Indian film industry was born as a result.

Efforts to produce movies had started in America, Britain, France, Russia, Japan and Germany in the previous century. America was in the vanguard of these efforts. In 1885 when Dadasaheb was studying in the J.J. School of Art, an inventive American, George Eastman, had invented a film for making movies. Coincidentally, when Dadasaheb was in the final year of his course at the Kala Bhavan in 1889, Eastman improved his film further, which is in use till the present day. This was an important stage in the progress of movie-making. The same year, the British inventor William Fridgegreen invented a camera that could use that film so that making and projecting movies on the screen made considerable progress. Because of this, as stated earlier, William Fridgegreen is considered the father of movie art.

The year Principal Gajjar handed over the studio and the laboratory of Kala Bhavan to Phalke, two important developments took place abroad. In 1893, George Melier of Paris succeeded in making trick photography: a man is transformed into an animal, he floats in the air, vanishes, is cut into bits and is rejoined. His short movie *A Trip to the Moon* is worth mentioning. The same year, on 1st February 1893, with the foresight of having to film the artistes appearing in a film in future, Edison constructed in New Jersey a studio, of the size of a room, which would allow sunshine to come in. He named it 'Black Maria'. Filming of some animals was done there too. Production of short movies had started in America, Britain and France from 1896. In 1903, when Dadasaheb started working in the Archaeological Survey department, the world's first movie with a story, called *A Great Train Robbery*, made by the American director Edwin Porter, was screened. Its length was only three quarters of a reel.

In 1908, Dadasaheb founded 'Laxmi Art Printing Works'. That year David Wark Griffith entered the American film world. He wanted to be a writer, but, willy-nilly, had to become an actor. Later, he became a director. He was the first to recognise the power of the camera. Filming until his time was done by placing the camera at a fixed place, as if filming a stage play. He was constantly thinking: What then is the difference between a play and a movie? He realised that no one had gauged the power of the camera. In 1909, for the first time, Griffith used the 'Close-up' in his movie, *Love of Gold*, because of which facial expressions could be seen clearly. His production department, however, did not like the idea. The audience thought him crazy: Who is this director? Where are the hands and feet of this character? We see the full figure of a person in a play, was their comment. They were not used to seeing a close-up. It was not possible at that time to understand its effectiveness.

In the movie *Romana* of 1911, Griffith used 'long shot', 'mid-shot', 'three-fourths' shot etc., which are used today. That led to the query: How can the camera move constantly from place to place? When doing this picture he took care to see that stage settings, make-up, light effects, shooting, script were proper and natural. Not just these things, but he also successfully used the modern techniques such as 'fade-in', fade-out' etc. as well. In 1912, in his movie *After Many Years*, he used the 'flash back' technique, which again led to severe criticism. "This director is a softhead. Why does he tell the story from the wrong end?" was the type of criticism he faced.

His photographer Billy Bitzer, however, understood that Griffith was a man ahead of his time. He was certain that Griffith was going to revolutionise the technique of film production. Without heeding the criticism, Griffith took amazing strides in technique and is, therefore, considered the 'father of film technique'. Initially, he was against producing small movies of one or two reels. How can a whole story be covered in limited length? How can it be effective? These were his objections. But the producers were not persuaded. Ultimately, the length of movies went on increasing as he advocated. The advances he made in the technique were slowly absorbed and taken further on.

Nearer home, Dadasaheb had left 'Laxmi Art Printing Works'. He had rejected, in no uncertain terms, the requests of the financiers who knocked his door. There was no other occupation or employment. Days dragged on without work, there was no plan for any other activity and there was no desire to work for someone.

Every evening, Dadasaheb went for a walk with his son Bhalchandra (Babarai). Once, when out roaming in a dejected mood, he went to see a movie, just to relax, in a theatre, which had opened in a tent on Girgaon Back Road at the place where the Harkisondas Hospital now stands. Mostly, American silent movies were shown there. Returning home at night, Babarai said to his mother, "Mom, we saw today men and animals moving about on a screen. It was wonderful." "What did you show him?" asked Saraswatibai. "Do you want to see? I will take you there tomorrow."

The next day, Dadasaheb took Saraswatibai to the show. As it was Easter, *The Life of Christ*, a movie on Jesus Christ's life, was screened that day. Viewing it, Dadasaheb wondered why such movies were not produced in our country. Our audiences see western culture in these movies. How will Indians be able to see their own culture? That must be done. We have any number of mythological and historical stories. If they were screened, they would have a good effect on the viewers. A message for the country's freedom can be spread. For that purpose, the business should be in Indian hands. Somebody must do it. Why somebody? I will do it, he thought. He saw Shrikrishna in place of Jesus on the screen and Yashoda in place of Mary. Lost in his thoughts, he did not know when the movie ended.

Saraswatibai was wonderstruck to see the pictures moving on the screen. On the way back home, she asked Dadasaheb, "How do the pictures move on the screen?" "You will come to know by and by," he said. "I am going to start the business of such moving pictures. Shrikrishna, Shriram, have to be shown instead of Christ." Hearing this, Saraswatibai was speechless. It was a revolutionary day in the lives of Indians: Saturday, 15th April 1911! Some records mention the year as 1910. Dadasaheb too has mentioned 1910 in his memoirs about this episode. But it was 1911, as the issue of *The Times of India* of 14th April 1911 contains an advertisement of the movie *The Life of Jesus*.

4

ORDEAL OF PRODUCING INDIGENOUS MOVIES

One Ganesh Vithal Kulkarni published a monthly, *Navyug*, since 1913. In one of its issues in 1918, Dadasaheb Phalke himself wrote, "I happened to watch the *Life of Christ* in a picture palace called *America India* in Mumbai in 1910. I must have seen movies a number of times earlier, must have often gone there for recreation with friends or family, but that day was a Saturday during Christmas. (The day was definitely Saturday, but the year was 1911 and it was not Christmas but Easter.) It marks a watershed in my life! There are millions of big and small businesses in the world, but that day a poor Brahmin like me from a priestly family laid the corner stone in India, on a scientific basis, of the business of cinema, which occupies the fifth place in the world!"

"While watching the *Life of Christ*, when the feelings of respect for Christ as a person were getting stronger, when I was unknowingly applauding the noble episodes in the life of Christ, I had a strange feeling inside me. What it was, is difficult to describe, but it is certain that while the life of Christ was moving fast before my eyes, I was seeing in those places *Bhagwan* Shrikrishna in his *Gokul*, *Bhagwan* Shriram in his Ayodhya. Whatever it may be, I was overpowered by some uncanny spell and I bought another ticket and saw the movie again. This time, instead of imagining, I began to see these things on the screen itself. Will this illusion become a reality? Will the sons of India ever see Indian scenes on the screen? This thought pestered me the whole night.

"The next two months, I did not feel at ease without seeing every movie screened at every picture palace (in fact, a theatre in a tent-like shelter) in Mumbai. During this period I constantly analysed the movies I saw and contemplated the odds against producing them in India. There was no doubt about the utility of this business from the financial aspect, about its importance from the industrial aspect. How to achieve it, was the question. I felt like having resolved the financial and technical issues and my inner voice told me that, by the grace of God, I would succeed. By His dispensation, I had already won gold and silver medals in the basic arts required for producing movies such as drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, stage art, magic etc. so that my hope for future success was becoming stronger. But what next? How to go about it?

"It was axiomatic that no matter how powerful my enthusiasm, how strong my conviction about success, no financier would take a risk to go ahead unless he was actually shown something concrete. So I sold everything I had and applied the proceeds to this venture, taking a blind leap into the infinite sky.

"My friends thought me crazy and one of them went to the extent of taking me to the lunatic asylum at Thane. Disposal of my trinkets was in progress. About a year went by getting catalogues, books and some equipment from Europe and ceaselessly experimenting. During this period, I might scarcely have got more than three hours' sleep at night.

"Deprived of sleep, going to movies every evening for four to five hours and in the remaining time thinking, experimenting, worrying about providing for the family and facing hateful jibes of relatives, the darkness of the unfathomable future which would end my dreams... these adverse circumstances affected my eyes. I developed cataract in both eyes and became completely blind. However, the timely treatment by Dr. Prabhakar restored my sight and with the aid of three or four pairs of spectacles I could resume my former routine. Hope springs eternal in human breast.

"This was a time of the *Swadeshi* movement, of use of Indian goods. There was a flood tide of speeches on *Swadeshi*. It had resulted in my quitting a secure government job and taking to an independent, industrial vocation. During this propitious period, I talked to my friends and leaders of the *Swadeshi* movement of my dreams and hopes about cinema. Even my friends of ten to twenty years standing and those with whom I had close relations in private or business life, thought my ideas were all moonshine and I became a butt of their jokes.

"Ultimately, a friend of mine with whom I had business relations for about ten years and who knew my character, love of business, perseverance, financial transactions, freedom from addiction etc., was prepared to consider the matter. I told him about the key to my success and persuaded him to agree. He was in a position, if need be, to help to the tune of about twenty-five thousand rupees.

"Anyone would understand what a pittance a sum of twenty-five thousand rupees was for my workshop, compared with the capital of Pathe and other European and American companies of about seven crore. However, my courage multiplied four-fold when I considered that I got the above sum somehow in a nation where even calling for cinema catalogues is deemed foolish, where the goal is restricted to the exhibition and sale of foreign goods, where seed of the co-operative principle is not yet sowed and where it is a nation of 'commission agencies'. There is no doubt that if I were to increase the figure of my requirement even a little more, I would have had to suppress my ideas and hopes till the end of my days.

"I was totally convinced that the sum of about twenty-five thousand was quite sufficient to create enough interest in the public to offer a capital of two lakhs or more, if necessary. My experiments, experience and self-confidence assured me of it. I hoped that if I screened a few films, from their proceeds, my studio would slowly expand. If necessary, my friend would arrange for more capital. Else, financiers eager to pounce on a ready-made scheme would easily come forward or, at least, my countrymen would, by forming a co-operative, help accomplish my task by a united effort.

"I am never impatient in my work or satisfied with half measures. I am proud of it. In regard to this project too, I did not think it right to take the risk of investing a big amount until I compared my own ideas with the actual situation on the ground by visiting Europe. I needed a very small sum for making a trip to Europe and buying the necessary equipment to prove to my friend that I had the skill and that it was not risky to invest more capital. Only that much amount I borrowed from him at a very high rate of interest and a solid security. I willingly signed a *Marwadi* partnership agreement according to which, if I succeeded by the grace of God, the financier would reap a rich harvest. Thus due only to my love of it and the self-confidence that I would most certainly establish in India the unforeseen art of cinema, I laid the foundation of a mammoth industry with very little capital (with which only a hair cutting saloon or a small restaurant could be started)." This gives an idea of the straits through which Dadasaheb passed and was going to pass.

Dadasaheb had bought from an English company a toy cinema and some reels of film. He started showing movies at night by focussing candle light on a lens and projecting the pictures on a wall. In order to find a book on cinematography, he went on visiting photography shops in the Fort area and elsewhere, but to no avail! Finally, in the Dhobi Talao area, in the photography shop of Nadkarni & Co, he got a book (ABC Guide to Cinema), worth a shilling. Although it did not contain much useful information, it had advertisements about the equipment, and was important from that angle. The nightly shows on the wall continued. Besides, going to cinema houses also had not stopped. Due to extreme strain on the eyes, he lost his sight again, but Dr. Prabhakar restored it as stated in Dadasaheb's article reproduced above. On losing sight, Dadasaheb was very much restless due to the prospect of his being unable to reach his goal, of being unable to make the cinema industry indigenous. He prayed to God that though he may not become a star in the sky, he may at least be allowed to become a household lamp.

Dr. Prabhakar had very rightly advised Dadasaheb not to do anything in future that would strain his eyes, but soon after he started seeing a little, Dadasaheb again began seeing movies and plays and reading the catalogues and books obtained from abroad. The objective of making the movie business indigenous, which had cast such a spell over this master craftsman would not allow him to rest. He was not in a mood to heed anybody's advice. It was not in his veins. He never let up until he finished whatever he undertook. He would not mind his health or home and hearth or anything else.

Dadasaheb had taken it to his heart to go to London to get technical knowledge. He met leaders of the *Swadeshi* movement and explained his plan to them: "It is essential that this cine-industry becomes Indian. Indians see the culture of foreigners through their films. When will they come to know the antiquity and greatness of Indian culture? Moreover, how will foreigners come to know Indian culture? This industry will gradually provide work to many. All my endeavours are meant for these objectives. Please consider all this". Since Dadasaheb was past forty, was penniless and his technical knowledge was bookish, no one encouraged him in his endeavour to make this industry indigenous.

How to get money for a foreign trip was a difficult question facing Dadasaheb. There was no prospect of getting financial assistance from anywhere. In January 1912, Dadasaheb told Yashwantrao Nadkarni, proprietor of Nadkarni & Company, his idea of producing Indian movies. Nadkarni respected Dadasaheb's imagination and skill in photography. He was the first to feel sure that if Dadasaheb meant it, he would fulfil his dream.

The very next day, Yashwantrao Nadkarni took Dadasaheb to his father-in-law Solicitor Abasaheb Chitnis. In that meeting, the solicitor counselled his son-in-law that there was no risk in giving a loan of up to ten thousand rupees to Dadasaheb for the project. The *Marwadi* agreement referred to by Dadasaheb was as follows. He clearly said, "I have nothing to offer as security against the loan, but I can offer you a partnership in the business for your daring in giving me a loan. Even if something untoward happens to me abroad, you will definitely get your money back, as I am ready to assign my insurance policies worth Rs 12,000 to you right now. I have nothing else."

Thus Dadasaheb secured a sum of Rs 10,000 by mortgaging his insurance policies and started preparations for going to London. When the news was out, there was criticism that he was running after a chimera. Some persons even said to Saraswatibai that when this money was gone, they would have to beg for a living. She silenced them saying, "I will be his partner in any adversity." Ignoring the criticism, Dadasaheb stood firm by his resolve and on 1st February 1912, boarded a ship for London.

On 3rd February a daughter was born to Dadasaheb. When he learned about it, he said it was a good omen: "First daughter, money faster." This daughter of his, Mandakini, was the first child heroine of the Indian film world. She did the part of 'Balkrishna' in Dadasaheb's renowned silent movie *Kaliamardan* of 1919. She lived in Nashik. I have recorded an interview with her lasting two hours for the National Film Archives.

Dadasaheb was a total vegetarian so that during his stay in London, food was a problem. Fortunately, however, a Maharashtrian Muslim named Mr Abdulla arranged for Dadasaheb's vegetarian meals in his hotel. Dadasaheb was religious-minded, but here caste barriers did not prevail. Dadasaheb told Abdulla the purpose of his visit, because of which Abdulla not only held him in great respect, but also treated him as his elder brother.

The problem of food having thus been solved, Dadasaheb now applied himself to his work with enthusiasm. In the Piccadilly Circus area of London, he saw a name-board of 'Bioscope Cine-weekly'. One who has to achieve one's goal cannot afford to be hesitant. Dadasaheb entered the office of the periodical. The editor, Mr Kepburn, was in his room. Dadasaheb met him and told him that he was a subscriber of the *Bioscope*. He also told him the purpose of his visit.

Mr Kepburn advised Dadasaheb against the adventure of movie production. He said, "Even in England many producers have been unsuccessful and many of those that are still in the field are pulling on somehow. Besides, the climate of India is not suitable for movie-making." Dadasaheb told him resolutely, "I have the self-confidence and persistence to surmount all difficulties". He then had a discussion with Mr Kepburn based on his technical knowledge gleaned from books. Dadasaheb's imposing personality, impressive style of speaking, his being a vegetarian and having no addiction, even of smoking, had a very salutary effect on Mr Kepburn. Impressed, he assured Dadasaheb of all possible help and co-operation. He got in touch with the famous film producer from Walton, Mr Cecil Hepworth, and requested him to give all guidance to Mr Phalke.

As a result, Hepworth's manager came to the railway station in his car to take Dadasaheb to the studio. Dadasaheb could see all the departments of the studio and their working, which was not possible even for a Londoner. Hepworth sent for his technicians and asked them to hold a demonstration of filming. Like Mr Kepburn, he too advised Dadasaheb on the machinery to be bought. Accordingly, Dadasaheb bought the essential equipment, namely, a Williamson camera costing fifty pounds, a printing machine and a perforating machine for the film. Hepworth agreed to the equipment being tested by doing a little filming. This was possible only because of Mr Kepburn's word and Mr Hepworth's affection for him. The dealer of the equipment also explained how to use it. Phalke's visit was recorded in the issue of *Bioscope* dated 28th May 1914.

Phalke stayed in London for two weeks. He happened to see there a movie titled *A Daughter of Bharat*. It was produced by Seling Corporation of London and depicted Indian life. The heroine's name was Mrs Pandita and the hero's, Mr Ramabai (which is a lady's name). He sported a beard and wore a fez, while Mrs Pandita wore shoes, lehnga (loose trousers) and covered her head with a scarf. Seeing this movie, any Indian would have been wild with rage because of its perverse view of Indians. Dadasaheb registered a strong protest with Mr Kepburn in this connection and said, "The missionaries seem to have spread misleading notions here about India, Indian culture and traditions. When I come here next year with my movie, you will see the real India". Thanking Mr Kepburn and Mr Cecil Hepworth profusely for their help, Dadasaheb returned to India on 1st April. Before returning, he placed an order with the Kodak Company for raw film. In those days, Dadasaheb had to go through a religious purification ceremony for having returned from abroad.

5

SAGA OF BIRTH OF FIRST INDIAN MOVIE

Dadasaheb returned from London. A convenient and spacious place was necessary for the filming of movies. He began a search for it. By then, Laxmi Printing Art Works had shifted from Mathuradas Makanji's Mathura Bhavan to Sankli Street at Byculla, so that his bungalow at Dadar was vacant. While in Mumbai, Dadasaheb had lived in this bungalow for seven years. He now called on Mathuradasseth, who was glad that a painstaking, imaginative artist like Dadasaheb wished to start a new venture in his bungalow. He handed it over to Dadasaheb who then shifted his family from Ismail Building at Charni Road to this bungalow. This birthplace of Indian Film Industy still stands at Dadasaheb Phalke Road, Dadar, with the name 'Mathura Bhavan'.

The subject for a movie was already under consideration. In his magazine *Suvarnamala*, Dadasaheb had already written a story, 'Surabaichi Kahani', depicting the ill effects of drinking. Before selecting the story, Dadasaheb saw the American movies screened in Mumbai such as *Singomar, Protea,* etc. in order to get a proper idea of the type of movies which the audiences like. He found that movies based on mystery and love were patronised by Europeans, Parsis and people in the lower strata of society. So, if a movie is to be public-oriented, its subject should be such as would appeal to the middle class people and women, so that they would see it in large numbers, and it should also highlight Indian culture.

Dadasaheb knew well that cultural and religious feelings were rooted deep in the heart. However materialistic the world may become, whatever the extent to which the outward face of religion changes due to the effects of the machine age, the common man's faith does not languish. (This is evident even today). Dadasaheb, therefore, decided to select a story, which would be well known to people all over India. Which one then? Shrikrishna's life or Savitri's, the ideal married woman devoted to her husband? Or king Harishchandra's, the sublime apostle of Truth? He started thinking constantly about it.

The machinery reached Mumbai port from London in May 1912. In the meantime, Dadasaheb had prepared a dark room and arrangements for processing the film, in his home. Work was on for constructing a small glass studio in the compound of the bungalow. The imported machinery was brought home and was cleaned by members of the family. Dadasaheb set it up within about four days with the help of the sketch accompanying it. There were no servants. He taught Saraswatibai the rather complex and laborious work of perforating the film.

Saraswatibai worked on the film at night after finishing the household chores of the day. It took three and a half hours to perforate 200 ft. of film. (If it were to be 1,000 ft. like they use it now, it would have taken at least eighteen hours). When Saraswatibai's arms hurt, the children would pitch in for a short while. Besides, Dadasaheb too would attend to it whenever he had time, as mentioned by Saraswatibai in the issue of the weekly *Dhanurdhari* dated 16th February 1946.

During the day, when she was free from her work in the afternoon, Dadasaheb taught her how to develop a film. She became proficient in that too. He had also taught her to load a camera. Night and day, the whole family was engaged in this work. Now it was time to try filming. So Dadasaheb filmed the fights of the boys and the playfulness of the girls living in the building opposite. He then processed the film and made a print. He had brought a projector from Germany, which he used to screen the film on a wall. All of them were satisfied with the result.

Dadasaheb decided to use the story of 'Raja Harishchandra', because a play on that subject was very much popular on the Marathi and Urdu stage. He wrote the script for it and also started making sketches for stage settings, costumes etc. What about the money, however? How to go about it? The investors' trust must be earned. Knowing that every one is fascinated by magic, he started making moves for a short film.

Dadasaheb planted some peas in a pot and placed a camera in front of it. As transformations took place in the seeds, they were to be filmed by 'one turn, one block' method for which purpose, the camera was kept firmly fixed in one place where it would not be even slightly disturbed, for one and a quarter months. Actually while viewing the short film on the screen, it lasted for about one and a quarter minutes. It showed the seed growing, sprouting and changing into a climber. Dadasaheb and Saraswatibai did the developing and printing of this film together.

They were naturally eager to see how it had turned out. It was a test of the ordeals they had had to face so far. Dadasaheb had a projector, but there was no electric supply in Dadar at the time. As a result, the short film *Growth of a Plant* was viewed on a screen hung up in the home, using a carbide lamp. Seeing on the screen the growth of the seeds since sowing, up to the stage of the pods appearing on the creeper, the children who had gathered there clapped with joy. The Phalke couple was overjoyed now that their long and strenuous efforts were going to bear fruit. Dadasaheb mentions all this in his interview published in the issue of *Kesari* dated 19th August 1913.

This short film was to be viewed using electricity.

Dadasaheb learnt that at Kalbadevi Mr Sethna's shop had both electricity and a projector. He called on Mr Sethna and expressed his desire and the latter agreed. Then a select group was shown the *Growth of a Plant*. Mr Nadkarni, who had stood behind Dadasaheb, giving financial support, was, of course, present. He was so overwhelmed seeing Dadasaheb's magic that he was dumbstruck. He only said, "Dadasaheb, you have sowed today the seeds of an indigenous cinema industry by sowing peas". Seeing this film, some persons offered a loan to Dadasaheb. Among them was Mr Narayanrao Devhare, a renowned photographer in the Fort area.

Dadasaheb did not, however, have anything to offer by way of security for a loan. He asked Saraswatibai for her jewellery and she too, most willingly, handed over to him all of it except the *mangalsutra*. To bring the story of Raja Harishchandra to the screen, Dadasaheb had to go through a harder test of character than Harishchandra and to depict the nobility of Taramati, he had to make his wife a beggar-maid.

Thus, the question of capital was taken care of. Now there was no problem in advertising for artistes and other employees. So he published advertisements in *Induprakash* and other prominent newspapers: 'Wanted actors, carpenters, washermen, barbers and painters. Bipeds who are drunkards, loafers or ugly should not bother to apply for actor. It would do if those who are handsome and without physical defect are dumb. Artistes must be good actors. Those who are given to immoral living or have ungainly looks or manners should not take pains to visit'. Even in spite of clear instructions, such persons came in large numbers. Dadasaheb felt so harassed that he decided to discontinue the advertisement and scout for the artists himself.

One Pandurang Gadadhar Sane, doing female roles in a theatre company named 'Natyakala' in Mumbai and another Gajanan Wasudev Sane, doing roles in Urdu plays, joined Dadasaheb's Phalke Film Company on a salary of Rs 40 per month. One Mr Dattatray Damodar alias Dadasaheb Dabke, an acquaintance of Gajanan Wasudev Sane, had a good physique and an imposing personality. Shri Phalke took him in his company and gave him the role of Raja Harishchandra. For the role of Rohidas, however, he could not get a boy because he too would have to go with Harishchandra and Taramati to live in forests, away from society. To complicate the matter further, Rohidas was to die in this movie. Whoever was approached for his son to do the role said that it was impossible for him to see his son's distress and ultimate death in the movie. At last Dadasaheb decided to assign the role to his son Bhalchandra. He was the first child actor of the Indian movie world. Now the problem was about the heroine - Taramati!

In response to the advertisement, four ugly prostitutes visited him. So Dadasaheb put in bold type in the advertisements: 'Only good-looking women should come for interview'. One day, a young woman with a passable appearance reported. She was someone's mistress. As she was prepared to work, Dadasaheb had her do the rehearsals for four days. On the fifth day, her master came to the place of the rehearsal and shouted at her, "Are you not ashamed, acting in a movie?" and dragged her away. In his eyes, working in cinema was less honourable than her profession. Dadasaheb thumped his head in despair.

Two other women from the same profession came to stay at Dadasaheb's house. Saraswatibai had got to look after them as her guests. Her elder brother-in-law thoroughly disapproved of it. She had, however, no other way. She did not deem it infra-dig. On top of it, the two women only ate and drank for two days and left without doing anything for Taramati's role.

Ladies from respectable families were not prepared even to look in the direction of acting in cinema. So, throwing all embarrassment to the winds, Dadasaheb started visiting the red light areas of Grant Road, Kandewadi etc. He could not, however, find any woman who could fit in the role of Taramati. On the contrary, he had to listen to many unsavoury things from those women about working in films. One of them said that if she acted in a movie, she would be ex-communicated by her village people. Another said, "You get permission for me from my master to work in cinema". With a couple of better-looking whores, he had a different kind of experience. They asked, "What will you pay for working in cinema?" Dadasaheb promptly replied, "I will pay you even forty rupees a month". They shot back contemptuously: "We earn that much in one night, many times. So what's the use of working in cinema?" Dadasaheb kept mum. He happened to come across a girl from Goa with good features and, on asking her, she directed him to her mother who said, "You marry my daughter. Then she will work in cinema". Dadasaheb was struck dumb.

Dadasaheb did not give up his search for Taramati, but there was no sign of finding one. Tired and dispirited, he was once having tea in Gokhale's restaurant at Grant Road, when his eyes fell on a fair complexioned boy with smart features who was serving there as a waiter. Dadasaheb had an idea. He asked the boy about working in cinema. He was getting two meals per day and ten rupees as salary per month. On Dadasaheb's offering to pay fifteen rupees, he promptly accepted. His name was Krishna Hari alias Anna Salunke. As in the case of drama companies, Dadasaheb's employees had both their meals at his house and auntie (Saraswatibai) cooked for about forty people without tiring or complaining.

Dadasaheb collected the local boys as well as boys from elsewhere for acting in the movies. He also recruited those who were no longer good enough for acting in plays, having lost pristine tenderness of voice. Casting was now ready. The role of Taramati was assigned to Krishna Salunke. (In some places it is stated that Pandurang Sane acted as Taramati, but there is evidence that Salunke had done the role). D.D. Dabke was Harishchandra, Bhalchandra was Rohidas, and Gajanan Wasudev Sane was Vishwamitra. Besides, Dattatray Kshirsagar, Dattatray Telang, Ganpat Shinde, Vishnu Hari Salunke, Nath Telang were also given important roles. The make-up of Anna Salunke posed a problem: He was not willing to shave off his moustache, as his father was alive. How could Taramati have moustache? Dadasaheb persuaded him and his father, and Krishna Hari alias Anna Salunke became the first heroine of the Indian film world.

Dadasaheb had laid down that men actors doing female roles should wear their hair long like women and take care of it. After coming to the studio they had to wear sarees and do women's chores like sifting rice, making flour etc. The object was that they should look woman-like on the screen and not sloppy. Rehearsals were started but it was a Herculean task to get these greenhorns to act. There were many among them who had not seen a movie. It was not possible for them to know what acting meant. Dadasaheb showed them again and again how to act. An actor named Sakharam Jadhav could not make an entry like a woman; so Dadasaheb himself wore a saree and showed him repeatedly how to make an entry. When acting for such scenes, Dadasaheb had to wear a saree so often. To show the actors how to express emotions, a number of photographs from English periodicals showing expressions on different occasions were hung up at the place of the rehearsals. Exercise was compulsory for every actor. The company gave them milk to drink regularly.

Dadasaheb viewed many foreign movies in order to study how to write a script and how to make a shooting script. He accordingly completed writing of the script of his movie. Rehearsals were also done. The shooting script was likewise ready. Now production was to begin. Dadasaheb took upon himself the responsibility for script, direction, art direction, make-up, editing and film processing. He could have done the photography too but as he was shouldering so many responsibilities single-handed, he asked his boyhood friend Triambak Balaji Telang to come to Mumbai. The evening *pooja* at the Triambakeshwar temple was the hereditary job of the Telang family. Although Triambak Telang was himself a hidebound conservative Brahmin, Dadasaheb had taught him still photography as a hobby. On receiving Dadasaheb's letter, Telang entrusted the responsibility of the *pooja* to his brother and came to Mumbai to lend a hand in his boyhood friend's new venture. Dadasaheb taught Telang all the mechanics of film photography and entrusted that responsibility to him. He also gave his two sons small parts in *Raja Harishchandra*. In short, Dadasaheb was also the progenitor of the various divisions and sub-divisions of film production.

The casting was complete. Jewellery and costumes were going to cost a goodly sum. Besides, it would have taken a lot of time to get together all the material like Raja Harishchandra's costume, crown, wig, swords and shields, bows and arrows. About the same time, *Rajapurkar Natak Mandali* (a drama company) was in Mumbai. Many of its shows were mythological. Dadasaheb already knew the proprietor of the company, Babajirao Rane. He called on Babajirao and acquainted him with his idea of indigenous movie production. Babajirao was himself a man of imagination and daring. He was impressed by Dadasaheb's project and derring-do and, wishing to give a helping hand to this new indigenous industry, he willingly asked Dadasaheb to take whatever material he wanted. Not only that, he also asked Dadasaheb to make use of whoever from his team of actors were useful to him. As the cast was already decided upon, the latter offer could not be made use of, but much of the problem of costumes was solved by Rane. Dadasaheb thanked him profusely. Saraswatibai's brother's *Belgaokar Natak Mandali* as also *Saraswati Natak Mandali* offered sincere help but it was not needed. Dadasaheb, however, appreciated their support.

Dadasaheb had designed the costumes and stage scenes from the paintings of Ravi Verma and the famous artist Dhurandhar. In those days, silk sarees were available with big borders with big end-scarf. He got Taramati's dress made of costly, high-faluting silk sarees by having some designs printed on them, which were suitable for the screen. He, however, bought the wigs for Taramati, Harishchandra and Rohidas at his own expense. He also painted the scenes of rajmahal, jungle, mountains, fields, caves etc. himself on curtains.

After the rainy season, the work of erecting sets started in the compound of the bungalow. Painter Rangnekar was appointed on Rs 60 per month. In the meantime, it was decided to do some out-door shooting at Wangani, a village on Mumbai-Pune railway line. A funny incident took place on the first day. An actor, who was to do a female role, was not willing to remove his moustache while his father was alive. Dadasaheb had to entreat him as in the case of Krishna Salunke and thereafter all the actors and workers left for Wangani.

Seeing the troupe of people wielding swords, shields, spears and wearing unusual clothes, a whispering campaign was afoot in the village. Some frightened villagers informed the village *Patil*, 'Some armed dacoits have entered our village'. The *Patil* was also shocked and immediately reported the matter to the *Fouzdar* who arrived in a short time with a police party and left for the temple where the troupe had lodged. Those persons pleaded imploringly, 'Sir, we are not dacoits. We work in cinema and have come here for shooting'. When, however, no one in this country knew what film shooting was, had never seen one, how would the Wanganikars know it? The *Fouzdar* did not believe their story, arrested them and took them to the police station.

Presently, completing some urgent tasks in Mumbai, Dadasaheb reached Wangani. He came to know what had happened. Promptly calling on the *Patil* and the *Fouzdar*, he explained to them what cinema was, what was meant by its shooting and took them with him to show them a demonstration of film shooting. Without loading the camera with a film, he went through the motions of filming a scene in which Raja Harishchandra wields a sword to behead Taramati who had been sentenced to death. God Shankar appears and stops Harishchandra. Viewing the scene and getting an idea of Dadasaheb's new venture, the *Fouzdar* and the *Patil* apologised to him and released the arrested persons. The shooting then started without any hitch.

A heart-warming incident took place during the shooting at Wangani. When Bhalchandra, in the role of Rohidas, was playing with the children of *Rishis*, he fell on a rock and started bleeding from the head. Dadasaheb always carried a first-aid box with him. On being treated, the bleeding stopped a good deal, but Bhalchandra was still unconscious. Some persons suggested that he should be taken to Mumbai for treatment and, after he had completely recovered, the shooting could be resumed. However, a scene was to be filmed in which Rohidas is dead and his body is carried and placed on the funeral pyre. As Bhalchandra was unconscious, he would not make any movement as wanted for the scene. Besides, waiting until Bhalchandra was well enough for the shooting and reconstructing the whole scene, would have meant time and money. In order, therefore, to avoid both, Dadasaheb stoically got the scene filmed in that difficult situation. After it was over, however, he broke down. When he saw the scene on the screen, his handkerchief was drenched with tears.

It was financially impossible to go to Kashi and shoot some scenes there, however much Dadasaheb would have loved it. The episodes happening in Kashi were quite a few. Ultimately, they had to be filmed at Triambakeshwar. The unit camped at Triambakeshwar for about a month. It was a family of about fifty people, comprising artistes, technicians and other staff. All of them lived in a building near the studio. At the time of outdoor shooting, meals were sent from Dadasaheb's home. Auntie (Saraswatibai) did all this work with care and consideration. Telang's wife helped her.

Dadasaheb did not okay a shot unless he was completely satisfied, notwithstanding how much the photographer and others admired it! He did not mind the amount of time and money it cost. He was, of course, exceedingly eager and anxious to confirm that the shooting done was all right. Even for outdoor shooting he would make arrangements in advance for developing the film. He would develop at night some of the film shot during the day and if it were not to his liking, he would shoot it again the next day. He was thus so engrossed in his work at night that he not only did not get enough sleep but also could not often take time off for his evening meal. He did not get time even to read the daily newspaper. As he worked very meticulously, it took 6 months and 27 days to produce *Raja Harishchandra,* a film of 3,700 ft., a mere four reels. As a result, the expenditure too went up.

Confronting numerous difficulties, Dadasaheb completed the first Indian movie. In earlier days, a play started with an introductory episode. Somebody floated the idea that this movie should also have such a beginning. Everyone suggested that Dadasaheb should be the compere and auntie should be the *Nati.* She did not, however, agree. Dadasaheb tried to persuade her: "Why do you object to standing by my side? Your two children will be with us and the cameraman is our Telang. Why should you then refuse?" Auntie said, "I will help you in all ways from outside. I won't mind working even as a coolie, but I would not like to appear on the screen". Others too urged her, but she did not budge. At last, Pandurang Sane did the role of *Nati* and filming of this episode was also over. Dadasaheb then began his efforts to get the film screened. All this information is from an article containing Saraswatibai's memoirs.

Saraswatibai stated in an article in the May 1962 issue of the magazine *Shreeyut*: "He pledged all his family, all his life to make the cinema industry indigenous".

6

AND *RAJA HARISHCHANDRA* WAS SCREENED!

It was not easy for this very first Indian movie to get a theatre for screening. Criticism of Dadasaheb had started already. 'These priests of Triambakeshwar, what do they know about cinema? And they are going to compete with foreigners! They must definitely have gone wrong. If we find that it is so, we shall throw *bhajias*, peanuts and eggs at the screen. They must have gone wrong'. Whenever she heard such malicious remarks, auntie would be disheartened.

In a way, anyone pioneering a daring venture hardly ever escapes being targeted by malevolent, disparaging criticism. When the cartoons of Walt Disney, the insuperable emperor of the cartoon empire, began to be screened, he was lambasted as the meteor of the cine-world. Yet, ultimately, he became the polestar of that world.

Dadasaheb decided to show *Raja Harishchandra* to some eminent persons. The date, place and time fixed was: 21st April 1913 at Olympia Theatre at 9 p.m. Yashwantrao Nadkarni helped, of course. The same day, infant Mandakini took ill with pneumonia and she was getting worse. Dadasaheb's brother advised him to postpone the show in view of his daughter's serious illness. Dadasaheb replied, "I have complete faith in God. I have already sent out the invitations. The theatre will be available only on that date. I have got to present the show on that date". In order not to get distracted while the show was on, he did not even inquire about his daughter's condition.

Dr Sir Bhalchandra Bhatavdekar inaugurated the show. Sir Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, Sir Manmohandas Ramji, the famous solicitor Vima Dalal, Mr Justice Donald of the Small Causes Court, the editors and representatives of most of the newspapers in Mumbai, some intellectuals and prominent persons from the business community were present with alacrity. Auntie and her nephew remained at home to look after Mandakini. Her brother-in-law said, "Today is a red-letter day in your husband's life. You too have struggled and suffered equally with him. You must attend. We shall look after the girl". As a result, Auntie too attended the show.

Like Sir Bhalchandra, Justice Donald too said while paying tribute to Dadasaheb, "We Europeans hardly ever get to see such mythological, educative pictures or shows. To learn from books, we do not know Sanskrit. From that viewpoint, this artistic presentation of Mr Phalke would be welcome even to Europeans. His movie has come out well".

Anant Narayan Kowlgekar, *Kesari's* representative in Mumbai, published the following review in the issue of the paper dated 6th May:

> The first performance of the play *Harishchandra* was worth seeing. The movements and acting of the characters on the screen were so realistic that the audience thought the characters were talking too. Some of the scenes in the play are very heart-rending and they are so well done that when living, talking, characters on a stage would not have been able to get the audience in tears, Harischandra and Taramati in the motion picture did. The scenes of forest, forest-fire, river, house of the man in charge of the burning ghat, the hen feeding itself around it and the burning ghat are excellent and thereby Shri Phalke has grandly brought his skill to the notice of the world. No praise will be enough for his skill and self-respect. Sir Bhalchandra Bhatavdekar frankly said while thanking him that all our newspapers should honour Shri Phalke by acknowledging his daring.

This praise reached Nanasaheb Chitre, Manager of Coronation Theatre, and he expressed to Dadasaheb his desire to screen *Raja Harishchandra*. So an important problem was solved, but the next one appeared. Will people come to see this Indian movie? Auntie decided to fast on five Thursdays, as this couple was devotees of God Datta, and declared, bowing to a framed picture of God Datta, that she would distribute sweets worth five rupees. In those days, five rupees was a big sum.

Dadasabeb's fear was not unfounded as, in those days, theatres had to screen two pictures a week to barely make both ends meet. If the movie were screened for only three or four days, how much income would it generate? If that happened in all places, how could he recoup his expenditure? The problem was really frightening.

Aryan Cinema was the second built-up theatre in Maharashtra and the first in Pune, which has now been demolished by the Pune Municipal Corporation. It was opened on 7th February 1915 and its owner was Bapusaheb Pathak. He once told me, "This business was not very profitable in those days. The competition from dramas, *támashas,* fairs and pilgrimages was very stiff. Initially, tickets were sold for an anna, but there was no response; so it was reduced to two paise. Even that made little difference. Women and highbrow society were indifferent to cinema. In order to attract women, we tried women doorkeepers but that too did not help. Then I tried a lucky number scheme for the tickets. The gifts included things such as saree, bicycle, watch etc. Scented handkerchiefs were given as gifts and the show was advertised by distributing hand-bills to the accompaniment of a band".

All possible efforts were made. In addition, Bapusaheb tried one more gimmick. He owned a flourmill. Whoever came to see the picture would get a fixed quantity of corn ground free of charge on showing his ticket. Similarly, whoever got his corn ground at the mill, would get a free ticket for the cinema show. A wide variety of inducements were offered which made the theatre pull on somehow. In 1916, a charity show was held in aid of a hospital, which was attended by dignitaries like Wrangler Paranjpe, famous novelist Hari Narayan Apte, Collector Hatch and others. When this became known, highbrow people got the courage and gradually started visiting the cinema theatre.

On 3rd May 1913, Dadasaheb Phalke screened the first Indian movie at the Coronation Theatre in Mumbai where exactly a year before Dadasaheb Torne's *Pundalik* was screened. Two years earlier, Dadasaheb had seen a movie on the life of Jesus Christ when, before the feature film started, a humorous short film *Fool's Head*, a magic show and one more short, one reel film of acrobatics were shown as added attractions. Keeping this in mind, he deliberately arranged to stage, before the feature film started, the dance of an English lady and his own humorous short film, *Fun With Matchsticks*.

An advertisement of *Raja Harischandra* was published in the then *Bombay Chronicle* of Saturday, 3rd May 1913. The timings of the show were: 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., 8:00 - 9:30 p.m., 10:00 - 11:30 p.m. and 11:45 p.m. to 1:15 a.m. There was a note at the end of the advertisement that the rates would be double the usual rates. Even so, the compound of the theatre was full of patrons and, what is more, most of them were non-Hindus like Parsis and Bohras. Marathi patrons were conspicuous by their deficiency. Seeing the overflowing crowd, the Phalke couple was overjoyed. Tears welled up in their eyes at the thought that their infinite toil and tribulations had borne such a delicious fruit. Yashwantrao Nadkarni remarked, "Madam, you had said you would distribute sweets worth five rupees. I am going to buy sweets worth Rs 100."

As observed in the review in the *Bombay Chronicle*, *Raja*

Harishchandra went on for a week with overfull audiences. Its run was, therefore, extended. After the show went on for 12 days, another advertisement was published in the *Bombay Chronicle* of 15th May. No advertisement was found necessary during the intervening period. Although the editor of *The Times of India* was a European, he showered hearty praise on the first Indian movie. Because of it, *Raja Harishchandra* got a lot of publicity and then our Marathi patrons went to see it, saying, 'Seems to be something good!' Those who had sneered at the comments of the dignitaries that it was 'a big wonder of the twentieth century' realised the truth.

In the advertisement published on 17th May, it was stated: 'Special show for only women and children at half rates'. It was also stated that Sunday, 18th May, was the last day of the show. However, the crowds continued to throng the theatre and so *Raja Harishchandra* continued for another week. It set a record by running continuously for 23 days. No other movie had lasted for more than four days until then. Thus the success of the first Indian movie, *Raja Harishchandra*, was unprecedented. It ran at the Coronation Theatre up to 25th May and thereafter, on 28th June, it was screened at the then Alexandra Theatre. There too, there were huge crowds.

Dadasaheb had another feather in his cap. *A Student of Prague* of Germany, *Quo Vadis?* of Italy and *Queen Elizabeth* of France were also the first movies of those countries and were screened that very year, and Dadasaheb proved equal to them. Besides, Dadasaheb's *Raja Harishchandra* was screened two years ahead of the famous movie *Birth of a Nation*, produced by David Griffiths, father of film technology. The corner stone of Indian cinema was thus laid in a way every Indian would be proud of.

Fortunately, of the four reels of *Raja Harishchandra*, the first and the fourth are with the National Film Archives, Pune, in a good condition.*

Dadasaheb himself has written in the magazine *Navyug*, "*Raja Harishchandra* brought in surprising returns. There was a demand for twelve prints of the film. However, one movie's earnings might perhaps be transient, like a storm. It was not proper to calculate the returns of film business on that basis. So I decided to produce another movie, *Mohini Bhasmasur*. Ashok Kumar, the distinguished senior actor of a later day, stated in an interview that *Raja Harishchandra* was the first movie he saw in his life. That was in his childhood, of course.

As there were no distributors in those days, Dadasaheb had to go from place to place, taking with him his own projector, an operator and some assistants. The overlord of the film world had to do this job too. The great popularity of *Raja Harishchandra* in Mumbai spread in all directions. The Bohra owner of 'Nawabi Theatre' of Surat expressed his desire to screen *Raja Harishchandra* in his theatre. A temporary agreement was signed for 50% partnership.

The 'Nawabi Theatre' was adorned with buntings and garlands, but the very first show brought in earnings of only Rs 3. As this was the result even after large-scale publicity, the theatre owner suggested the show be cancelled and the ticket money refunded. He said, "There is no doubt that your show is very good, but there have to be viewers. Your show does not last for even one and a half hours. The people here are used to seeing plays lasting six hours on a ticket costing one anna less than yours. Either increase the length of your show or reduce the rate."

Neither of the suggestions was possible. True to his nature, Dadasaheb replied, "These people who have bought tickets have paid solid money. The only loss will be that I will have to use my film for only these 16 persons. When these people go home after seeing my movie, four times their number will come tomorrow. I will run the show for one week as agreed upon". In the next day's newspaper, Dadasaheb issued the following advertisement in Gujarati: "In one anna, see 57,000 photographs of three quarters of an inch width and two miles length". The advertisement had the desired effect and expecting to see something wonderful, a big crowd of eager viewers collected that evening. The earnings jumped from Rs 3 to Rs 300. Throughout the week the box office earnings were exceedingly good. Seeing the magic wrought by Dadasaheb's clever advertising, the theatre owner was astounded. What is impossible for ingenuity?

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* It has been verified by the author that these reels have survived the recent fire at the Film Institute. - *Translator*

Thereafter, *Raja Harishchandra* received a spontaneous welcome everywhere. Dadasaheb's humorous short film *Paws of Flour*, which accompanied the feature film, opened a new chapter in the history of Indian cinema. Dadasaheb wrote in *Navyug*, "As I started getting money from the film, I invested it in the factory. (As already mentioned, a film studio was called a factory in those days). Besides, when my friends were assured of the income from a print of each of the three movies, they helped me whenever the need arose. Even so, it is worth remembering that a print of each of the three films brought easy cash to the factory. Later, *Raja Harishchandra* ran to big audiences at Colombo and Rangoon too".

Filming had to be kept on hold during the monsoon season, as it was totally dependent on sunlight. Dadasaheb applied this interval to the good cause of propagating Indian films. As, however, it was not his intention to enter the business of film screening or distribution, he focussed his attention again on film production, as soon as the monsoon was over. As the film was to be screened throughout India, he provided Hindi sub-titles too along with Marathi ones.

He was, however, inclined to limit sub-titles to the minimum, being of the view that the audience should be able to construct the implied conversation in an episode from the acting, facial expressions and movements of the actors.

Although Mumbai was very convenient for business, Dadasaheb did not find it convenient for film production in those days. From the point of view of making the public interested in cinema so as to make the Indian cine-industry stable in the country, he thought it advisable to produce mythological pictures about gods and the like. As mythological stories were well known all over India and the public at large had faith in them, Dadasaheb's thinking was right from the standpoint of business. As Nashik was convenient for reaching temples, rivers, *ghats,* stone carvings, forests, mansions etc. required for such films, Dadasaheb moved the Phalke Film Company to Nashik on 3rd October 1913.

Dadasaheb rented the '*howd*' bungalow, opposite Phule Market, of a Gujarati landlord, Balkrishna Dadaji Vaidya, on a rental of Rs 75 per month. The three-storeyed bungalow had two out-houses and a spacious open ground on all sides. On the right, there was a grove known as 'Warchi Baug' on a small elevation, which was full of various kinds of trees such as mango, guava, jackfruit, custard apple, *kavath, bakuli, umbar* etc. There was also a huge tree of *bakan limbu.* Under this *bakan* tree, Dadasaheb erected a temporary studio in natural surroundings. There were no reflectors then as we have now. So Dadasaheb used a sheet of white cloth to get the desired degree of brightness. Over a long period, it was Saraswatibai who stood holding a sheet in her hands as would be instructed by Dadasaheb.

For his next movie, Dadasaheb selected the story of 'Nal-Damayanti'. All preliminaries were complete but due to some problems it had to be put on the back burner. Then he took up the story of 'Mohini-Bhasmasur'. About the same time, Chittakarshak Natak Company had come to Nashik for their performances of 'Totayache Banda' and Shakespeare's plays. A mother-daughter duo, Durgabai and Kamlabai Kamat, worked in this company. Dadasaheb had seen the company's performances. As luck would have it, Kamlabai took ill with typhoid. So she remained behind while the company departed for the next leg of the tour.

After recovering from her illness, Kamlabai agreed to act in *Mohini-Bhasmasur* for fun. Dadasaheb seized the opportunity. She was good-looking and Dadasaheb gave her the role of Mohini. Durgabai also acted the role of Parvati. Thus these ladies were the first two lady artistes of the Indian screen. Raghunathrao, brother of Rambhau Gokhale, proprietor of 'Chittakarshak', was also a well-known stage artiste. As Kamlabai married him, she became Kamlabai Gokhale. A documentary on her life has been produced recently. She was the mother of the famous cinema, drama and television artiste Chandrakant Gokhale and grandmother of Vikram Gokhale whose name is at the forefront of the three media. The outdoor shooting of *Mohini-Bhasmasur* at Gangapur, Nashik, and Triambakeshwar was speedily completed and it was screened at the Olympia Theatre of Mumbai on 2nd January 1914.

The humorous short film, *Paws of Flour*, which was produced simultaneously with *Raja Harishchandra*, was also shown along with *Mohini Bhasmasur*. Although some critics opined that Dadasaheb had sacrificed decency for the sake of humour in that film, a large proportion of the audience thoroughly enjoyed it. *Mohini-Bhasmasur* too was welcomed with zest.[3]

The length of *Mohini-Bhasmasur* was 3,264 ft. For the scene in which Bhasmasur puts his hand on his own head and is reduced to ashes due to the power bestowed on him by God Shankar, Dadasaheb thought of a trick. He first filmed a scene showing Bhasmasur writhing with unbearable pain due to the heat of fire. Then keeping the camera in the same fixed position, he retracted the film and ignited some spoiled film in the place where Bhasmasur stood. Thus he achieved the effect of Bhasmasur burning.

Dadasaheb took up the mythological story of 'Satyawan-Savitri' after *Mohini-Bhasmasur* for his next silent movie. Its shooting also started soon. Ladies doing female roles, which had not happened on the stage, was achieved by Dadasaheb in his previous movie in 1913. As he could not get Kamlabai Kamat (Gokhale) for the movie *Satyawan-Savitri*, he got the role of Savitri performed by a prostitute.

It was a heart-rending scene in which Yamraj takes away Satyawan's life force and Savitri sorrowfully begs him to restore her husband to life. But this Savitri was not able to express the proper emotions. Dadasaheb repeatedly showed her how to do it, even acted himself, but it made little difference, as she was not an experienced artiste. Ultimately, Dadasaheb said, somewhat harshly, "Your husband has fallen dead here, Yamraj is taking away his life, but your face shows no emotion although I have tried so hard". The woman, instead of becoming serious, began to laugh. Someone said to Dadasaheb, under his breath, "Sir, this woman does not have only one husband. If one leaves, there is always another. So how can she have that emotional expression?" Dadasaheb must have understood. He got the scene done by the woman to the extent possible, without any more fuss.

There was one more episode during the filming of this movie. The role of Yamraj was given to a gymnast, but that roughneck was afraid of riding a buffalo. Dadasaheb himself mounted the buffalo to show him, but it would not stand still. After trying for a long time, the shooting was given up for the day and was somehow gone through the next day, making the Yamraj sit on a she-buffalo.

When viewing the movie the audience did not notice that Yamraj was riding a she-buffalo, instead of a he-buffalo. Even so, it did not escape the notice of an alert critic. He severely criticised Dadasaheb and said, "Dadasaheb should immediately show Yamraj riding a he-buffalo, otherwise we shall have to take action to stop screening of the film". This, of course, had no effect on the audience. On the contrary, the crowds swelled even more. There was a large number of ladies in the audience and *Satyawan-Savitri* proved exceedingly profitable like its two predecessors. Dadasaheb himself has mentioned this. Thus he achieved for all the three movies a great financial as well as worldly success and made the foundation of Indian cinema very strong. *Satyawan-Savitri,* which was screened on 6th June 1914, had a length of 3,680 ft.

7

SECOND UNSUCCESSFUL TRIP TO LONDON AND ENDLESS DIFFICULTIES

All the three movies of Dadasaheb, *Raja Harishchandra*, *Mohini-Bhasmasur* and *Satyavan-Savitri* achieved extraordinary financial and worldly success and all the debts were paid back. Money was continuing to flow in from all the three films and in view of his success, he was able to assist some of his friends too. So much income was earned from only one print of each movie.

Consequently, Dadasaheb's fame spread to foreign countries too. There was a demand for 20 copies each of his movies. In India, some persons were ready to take a sole agency of his movies. Some 500 to 700 theatre managers in India wanted his movies for screening. Considering the tremendous response to the movies, Dadasaheb thought of buying electrical machinery by spending twenty-five to thirty thousand rupees. Till then the machinery had to be worked by hand because of which work went on at snail's pace. The speed of the film too fluctuated. He knew that he had to have a proper studio for producing movies to his satisfaction. He convinced his friends that with that much capital, Indian cinema business could be run profitably and the technicians trained by him would be useful for the purpose.

With equipment which was not only insufficient but far from up to date, Dadasaheb had so trained his assistants in the various branches of film production by labouring continuously for two years, that he was confident they would turn out work of the standard achieved by technicians of America and England. That confidence was quite legitimate. When he screened his movies later in London, the expert technicians working in studios equipped with the latest machinery in foreign countries as well as knowledgeable persons in the field admired his work. The cine-journals there reported it. Dadasaheb gave the credit for the eulogy to his technicians.

On 1st August 1914, he left for London for buying electrically operated equipment. As war clouds of the First World War were gathering and the war was likely to break out any moment, his relatives and well-wishers advised Dadasaheb not to go to London just then. However, as was his wont, he departed for London without heeding anybody's advice, taking with him his movies, *Raja Harishchandra*, *Mohini-Bhasmasur* and *Satyawan-Savitri*. The World War sparked off on the 4th of August.

The war caused great panic in India. Many people sent their families to the countryside. Comparatively, the atmosphere in England was commendable. Stability and firmness were evident. There were hoardings everywhere announcing 'Business As Usual'. News bulletins pertaining to the war were issued every half an hour. Dadasaheb was, therefore, quietly engrossed in buying his equipment. Mr Kepburn, editor of the cine-periodical *Bioscope* and Dadasaheb were friends already. He arranged to screen Dadasaheb's movies for persons connected with the cinema industry in London.[4]

Viewing Dadasaheb's movies, *Raja Harishchandra*, *Mohini-Bhasmasur* and *Satyawan-Savitri* in London, everyone was astonished. In regard to his technical skill, *Biograph* wrote, "From the technical point of view his pictures are surprisingly excellent", whereas another cine-periodical, *Kinotograph*, wrote with emotion, "Why was this Phalke not born in England?" Other newspapers too praised his movies no end. The most important thing was, as mentioned in a previous chapter, when Dadasaheb saw the malicious perversity of Indian culture depicted in the English movie *Daughter of Bharat*, he had told Mr Kepburn with great self-confidence that they would see the real Indian culture in his movies. That proved to be literally true.

Phalke had not received training in film techniques from anyone. When he proved by his movies that he was a self-made man, some producers asked him to produce movies in England. The foremost among them was producer Cecil Hepworth himself, who had helped Dadasaheb in every way when he had visited London the first time. A distinguished producer like Hepworth placed before him a scheme according to which Dadasaheb was to produce Indian movies in England, bringing artistes and technicians from India whose travel expenses, expenditure on lodging and boarding in England and salary would be paid by Hepworth. Phalke himself would get a salary of 300 pounds a month besides 20% of the profits. Anyone would have been tempted to accept such a profitable, easy-on-the-job scheme, which would have ended all one's worries. Had he accepted the proposal, Dadasaheb would have achieved fame and fortune and could have lived in England with his family in luxury. However, he expressed his heartfelt thanks to Mr Hepworth and, politely refusing the offer said, "I strove hard, subjected my family to suffering, fought many a danger and difficulty in order to make this an indigenous business for India. It is my aim and obsession that this business should be in Indian hands, that through this medium, along with public entertainment there should be education of the public too and that Indians and even foreigners, if possible, should come to know Indian culture. If I accept your offer, I will be deviating from my aim and ideal and so I am unable to accept it, for which I beg your pardon".

These thoughts, these words, are sufficient to prove that Dadasaheb was a fervent patriot. The fame of his movies had reached America too. As in England, the world famous Warner Brothers of America had expressed their desire through their office in England to buy some copies of his films. He accepted the offer too. However, considering the news from India and the worrisome condition of his studio, he had to return without concluding any agreement regarding the sale of copies of the films. He had only completed his purchase of the electrical equipment. He had gone to London with great daring and enthusiasm without fear of the war. If the proposal regarding sale of copies of his films had gone through, he would have got a lot of capital. But it was not to be. He had to return empty-handed. Learning of the situation in India, he was naturally anxious. All his enthusiasm had abated. From this point of view, his trip was unfortunately a total failure. He returned to India by the end of 1914.

Dadasaheb was worried about what he would have to face on returning to India, what the situation would be like. When he reached Nashik, he found the situation worse than he feared. The moneylender had not only stopped advancing money, but had also asked to lock the studio, and dismiss all the employees. Saraswatibai pleaded with him not to lock the studio or dismiss the employees until Dadasaheb returned, but he was not at all prepared to part with more money. Due to the atmosphere of uncertainty created by the war, no financier was prepared to offer capital to Dadasaheb. On the other hand, those who were likely to give financial help had invested their money in other businesses.

Dadasaheb was already in debt. In such circumstances, if the studio were to be closed, he would have had no option but to apply for insolvency. If that were to happen, the premature death of the indigenous cinema industry was inevitable and that would have been a disgrace for India in

England and America. That was his regret. He started working towards saving the indigenous industry. He first implored Yashwantrao Nadkarni and his father-in-law Mr Chitnis to give an immediate loan to bring to India the equipment he had bought in England, to keep it from rusting and for the studio to function for a year. He assured them that he would produce a movie in a year's time and would repay the loan. He also told them the reactions of the knowledgeable persons in western countries about the three movies and the demand for copies.

They agreed to offer only half the expenses on a short-term basis. Such was the faith of some of his loyal employees in Dadasaheb that they showed their willingness to work on half pay. That also shows the magnanimity of their heart. The equipment bought in England arrived and work started, but problems continued one after another. During the wartime it was difficult to get even raw film. Dadasaheb decided, therefore, to produce short films, which could be ready in a short time such as *The Festival of Kartiki Pournima*, *A View of the River Godavari*, *The Glass Factory of Talegaon* and *The Magic of Prof Kelfa*. It was also his intention that these movies should show to Indians as well as foreigners the grandeur of ancient India and Indian culture.

However, the creditors went back on their word. Other creditors asked various questions: If business dwindles, people will not come to see cinema. How then would we recover our money? What if you die suddenly? What if good movies are not produced hereafter? A lakh of rupees of Dadasaheb were locked up in the studio, but neither could he put it to use, nor could the employees be sacked. If they were discharged, who would invest money in the business? Old movies no longer brought in money. Some of the staff were down with malaria. The photographer got seriously ill twice. The electrician died of cholera. The generator was in disrepair. To cap it all, it was found that Phalke's manager needed surgery. The police had registered a false case against him. The police sent him to the J. J. Hospital like some unclaimed property, but Dadasaheb moved in the matter and got him acquitted and released and he came through the surgery safely. However, Dadasaheb had to pay the lawyer's fees. With every new date for the court case, Dadasaheb had to make a trip to the court. The expenditure on travel and on collecting evidence of the manager's innocence, had to be met. Dadasaheb did not have enough money but he did all this for humanity's sake.

Dadasaheb resolved: 'I will put my life on the line but so long as I breathe, I will not allow this indigenous industry to die'. No one, however, was willing to advance a loan without a security. Ultimately, he obtained a loan on the security of the studio and started preparations for the movie *Raja Shreeyal*. Filming started but new difficulties continued to crop up. The actor doing the role of king Shreeyal had fever with 103 degrees temperature, yet continued to work. Some five scenes were shot somehow and then the actor had a relapse. His illness became serious and it was difficult to say when he would recover completely. To add to it, the heroine sprained her ankle so severely while descending a staircase that she could not even stand. All these happenings harried Dadasaheb so much that he suffered from migraine.

The extent to which the filming would be prolonged, the burden of the debt would increase to that extent. Dadasaheb, therefore, decided to do the role of Shreeyal himself. His son Bhalchandra, who had done the role of Rohidas in *Raja Harishchandra*, was assigned the role of Chilaya, the King's prince. To help him out from the difficult situation, Saraswatibai said to him, "You are going to be King Shreeyal, our son will be Chilaya; it is difficult to get another heroine, so make me Changuna (Shreeyal's queen). In the film *Fun With Matchsticks* you had got matchsticks to act, so it should not be difficult for you to teach me acting. The only condition is that my name should not appear anywhere". The dedicated wife was prepared to apply paint to her face (which ladies of social status abhorred) for the sake of her husband. To meet the expenditure of the undertaking, her jewellery had already been sold. It had become a practice that whenever necessary, her jewellery would be sold and when the financial position improved, new jewellery would be bought. She was satisfied with having only her *mangalsutra* (a necklace of black beads woven in cotton thread or gold wire as one could afford, as a mark of a married woman). All these trials and tribulations notwithstanding, *Raja Shreeyal* could not be completed.

Phalke's attempts to obtain capital started again. He called on the leaders of the *Swadeshi* movement once more, but no one helped him. On the contrary, they ignored his request. He went to the wealthy again and again, but in vain. In Achyut Balwant Kolhatkar's newspaper *Sandesh*, he published an advertisement appealing for help from Re 1 onwards, assuring repayment with interest, but it was shocking that although pompous assurances of help were given orally by many, only three persons actually came forward to help. One of the three wrote a detailed letter in *Dainik Sandesh* and appealed to the leaders of the 'Home Rule Movement' that as they had 1,500 members, if every member contributed only Rs 5, Phalke's financial worry would be mitigated to some extent. This Movement knew Phalke very well. They were well acquainted with his mission and capability. They said, "We are unable to give a big sum and we feel it infra-dig to give a little". Arguing why the members could not give financial help, a prominent leader of theirs said, "Shri Phalke should first enrol himself as a member of the Home Rule Movement. When India gets Home Rule, his problem regarding capital would be solved automatically". This shows how the leaders of the *Swadeshi* movement cleverly bypassed Phalke's mission of *Swadeshi* cine-industry. Nobody was willing to give a loan to a pauper Dadasaheb at a rate of interest of 11% even on the security of gold.

Lokmanya Tilak had once visited Dadasaheb's studio. As they were known to each other, Dadasaheb called on him and related to him his sorry tale. Lokmanya was moved by it. A seer like him knew that movies were a very powerful medium for awakening the masses, and so tried to arrange for a loan from the Paisa Fund organisation, but did not succeed. Then Dadasaheb again appealed to the general public: 'Let not this undertaking die'. Income had stopped and debt was increasing. Dadasaheb was paying quarterly instalments of compound interest on his debt. He could not pay his employees' salaries, yet they were attending the studio every day, which made him emotionally surcharged. Only the moral support of his wife and well-wishers had kept him from despondency and debility.

In 1916, Dadasaheb tried a different method to raise funds. He decided to screen in major cities the three movies, *Raja Harishchandra*, *Mohini-Bhasmasur* and *Satyawan-Savitri*, which had been admired by foreigners, and undertook a tour to raise capital.

He screened the movies for the Princes of Jamkhindi, Aundh and Miraj. In each place, his work was praised. The Raja of Aundh granted Rs 1,000. The other two gave nothing except praise. Then he visited Gwalior and Indore. As there were no theatres, he had to carry all the equipment. He camped in Gwalior for two months but did not get any financial help. In Indore too, he camped for two months. The Princess of Indore gave a loan of Rs 5,000 and Rs 1,500 as payment for his shows. Shreemant Mamasaheb Talcher handed over the money to Dadasaheb who then returned to Nashik.

During this tour, Dadasaheb visited Kirloskarwadi. A report on the visit was published in an issue of *Kirloskar* in 1916. Laxmanrao Kirloskar duly welcomed Dadasaheb. A photograph of the two together is available. Dadasaheb showed his movies there too. When the show was over, a man touched Dadasaheb's feet, who said, "What are you doing?" He replied, "You made pictures move!"

A humorous incident took place at the railway station. A hawker of toys was shouting, "Phalke for four annas, Phalke for four annas".

Dadasaheb quipped in good humour, "He has valued me appropriately". To which Laxmanrao's riposte was, "Those toys make movements, that's why he is shouting like that. You showed pictures making movements, isn't it? It means your fame has reached these people".

The glass works of Paisa Fund had agreed to give Dadasaheb Rs 1,000. It is not clear what politics was involved, but in the nick of time, he got a 'No' from them. One can pretend anything, but one cannot pretend being rich. The shocks of reality sear an artist's spirit. Fame, artistic success, the heady ecstasy of creativity—all look like an empty vaunt. Dadasaheb too had this devastating experience. When creditors started putting spokes in film production and three years of continuous efforts for getting working capital proved futile, Dadasaheb, as a last resort, invoked the public at large and wrote an open letter. Readers will see how withering is this letter of the father of Indian Cinema.

Dadasaheb Phalke's open letter to his compatriots:

Please Do Read It

'Shree'

Howd Bungalow, Nashik
Chaitra Shuddha Pratipada, 1839

My Dear Compatriots,

You will be enchanted, your heart will melt, on seeing some memorable scenes from *Raja Harishchandra*, the immaculate, venerable, great king whose life story I have placed before you today in the form of a movie. Before screening it, I make bold to place before you the following few lines with the sole intention that my own people should know the inner thoughts, the true nature of the hardships that have befallen the man from whose heart these scenes have taken shape.

I have written the preface. But what next? What should I say? This thought cramps my mind. A person may be small or big, but every one has a 'story' of his own. It is not my intention to tell you my story. It is also not my intention to attract your attention by some beautiful episodes in my story. Should I tell you only this that I worked day and night in order to make inventions in photography; that in order to enhance my country's interest and achieve fame for myself throughout India I quit a cushy government job and got mired in poverty; that as soon as the idea of cinematography dawned in my mind, I leaped into the fire of an uncertain future though almost completely blind? For the development of arts, which had obsessed me, I snapped the strong ties of love for my dearest wife and children and hastened to the continent of Europe three times. When I was of the age of enjoying family life, I yoked my dear wife and child to the work in the studio and persuaded them to think that that was our family life. Oh, no! I have not said these things to sing the praises of my own self before the public. Those words were automatically penned when the memories of my loyal family and honest employees who confronted the bitterest of conditions with fortitude for five long years, filled my heart to overflowing. To escape the torments of my hobby-horse of cinematography I cannot but unconsciously desire to rush to some mountain in search of God. My heart tells me that the road to God-realisation is not as hard as the rough-tough road I have taken for cinematography. But along with the thought of God the thought of my beloved country enters my mind and I quietly get engrossed again in my work with an extraordinary inspiration.

Many people praise me to the skies for the success I have received by God's grace in making films. They offer me gold medals, even shower flowers on me in theatres! But what next? When the time comes to answer that question, all these eulogists become colder than icebergs. Due to the vocation of cinema, I am in debt to the tune of thousands of rupees. The earnings of about seventy thousand from three plays and the creditor's dues amounting to over fifty thousand including interest are locked up in the machinery and expenses. I have to turn away hundreds of customers, as I am depressed due solely to a lack of working capital. The moneylender's interest is mounting. There is no alternative to shouldering the studio expenses.

With great pain, I place these few unvarnished yet heartfelt words before my dear compatriots because I passionately nurse an ardent desire day and night that the flow of income from my films may continue unabated, that I may be free from debt, that this art may get a permanent abode in my beloved country and may prosper, that it may, as far as possible, be used for the welfare of the people instead of for mere entertainment and that it may become the means of livelihood of hundreds of people.

Humble servant of dear compatriots,
Dhundiraj Govind Phalke

8

REVOLUTION WROUGHT BY *LANKADAHAN*

Dadasaheb received no response to his heart-rending appeal. Only three persons were willing to help financially. It is noteworthy that they were middle class men living in ordinary circumstances. Here too a touching incident took place. A poor couple from Nashik approached Dadasaheb. They respectfully bowed to him. The married lady, who had only a set of two gold bangles besides her *mangalsutra*, placed those bangles on Dadasaheb's feet. Their financial status was quite apparent from a look at them, so Dadasaheb politely declined to accept the jewellery. They respectfully said to him, "This is all we have to offer. If we had anything more, we would have gladly given it". Even after this pleading, Dadasaheb was disinclined to accept the bangles. The lady then said, "If you do not accept this jewellery, I will immediately go to a goldsmith and sell it. Whatever money I get, I will keep at your feet. For all these years I have worn this jewellery. Now the time has come for its meaningful use. Please do not upset my resolve. Allow these poor people to do at least this much to help your mission for the country". Having no option, Dadasaheb accepted the bangles of that venerable lady with tearful eyes and the couple left joyfully.

A session of the Mumbai Provincial Congress Parishad was held at Nashik on 17th and 18th May 1917. Lokmanya Tilak attended it. At the request of Dadasaheb Khaparde, he visited Phalke's studio. A report of the visit was published in the editorial of Achyut Balwant Kolhatkar's *Sandesh* in its issue dated 20th May under a heading pertaining to the incident mentioned earlier: 'Wife's Jewellery...' It said:

> After the usual hospitality and felicitations, Dadasaheb Phalke made a speech addressing about three hundred delegates present. While explaining to Lokmanya his ambition, the national importance of Indian cine-industry and the difficulties he had had to face, his voice choked with emotion to such an extent that he could not utter a word more and tears welled up in his eyes. Two minutes passed in silence and he sat down. Dadasaheb's statement, 'Sir, this heart is a burning pain,' had such a tremendous effect that many persons gave him sums ranging from fifteen to a hundred rupees on the spot. Those who did not have money on them, requested Dadasaheb to send someone to the Camp area. A person of ordinary means from Amravati declared his resolve on the spot: 'I am ready to give Re 1 every month to Dadasaheb Phalke!' Compared with Dadasaheb's requirement of thirty thousand rupees, Gulabrao's one rupee was a drop in the ocean! But if you consider the fervent nationalism that inspired the assurance, its heart-warming devotion, the immensity of that faith, you will be convinced that an ordinary man would not but have fainted.

The editorial made a mention of the couple's indescribable sacrifice too and added:

> The poverty of India which makes us feel sorry, is not the poverty of riches but of the purity of heart. The act of that couple was inarticulate. Neither of them speaks from the dais. They serve you and rule your heart. You may have an irresistible desire to meet the couple who have given up their all, but do not feel satisfied by merely meeting them. If you wish to be emotionally one with them, take first an oath to help Shri Phalke to the best of your ability and, if possible, go and meet Shri Ranade who has damaged his eye sight by resolving to collect money at every drama performance in Pune and Smt Satyabhamabai who considers emulating her husband's example as the fulfilment of her life's mission, so that you will be convinced of the truth of the enthralling story about sacrifice of everything that we have reported.

Dadasaheb once wrote a long article in an emotional vein in *Navyug* magazine. I quote below an excerpt from it as it gives an idea of his financial and mental condition:

> Sometime back the Paisa Fund had harnessed themselves to the yoke to help me. The village which gave about Rs 100-125 to the Fund at Dasara every year, declared in the newspapers that it would collect Rs 1,000 at Dasara and deposit the amount in the Fund's account if the Fund was going to be used for the studio of someone like Shri Phalke. When the circumstances were so favourable to me and when I had the backing of two or three persons from the Fund and it was also decided to give me a certain amount, I do not know what came in the way. Many stories have reached my ears, but in my view ten chatterboxes do not accomplish any work, which a few active workers can.
>
> I have been so foolish in the matter of my hopes, dreams and patriotism in this venture, that although there was no hope of getting a single pie on loan, I am continuing to incur the liability of paying quarterly compound interest to the moneylender. The surprising thing is that my employees too have been foolish like me. However, my compatriots, who are qualified to ask for Home Rule, did not take pity on me. In this fit of madness, I had even published a handbill, an extract from which follows:
>
>> 'Make this organisation a limited company, a syndicate or a partnership venture or help it pay off the interest, but do not let it shut down. What more can I say than this: If the rich people have some funds reserved for a good cause in the name of any of their dear ones and if they part with any portion of it for me, I will not charge anything for my labour but will spend the money for the good deeds. My compatriots may use the profits from my studio for Paisa Fund, libraries, orphanages for girls, Seva Sadan or any other, but save my organisation.
>>
>> 'My own needs are few beyond imagination. My children's education will be taken care of entirely by the Lord. If, however, due to the ditching by, and lack of firmness on the part of, my own people, instead of such a useful and entertaining undertaking prospering, this industrial

> institution is destroyed, it would have to be regretfully admitted that Hindusthan is still unfit to demand Home Rule. Oh, no! I will end by praying to the Lord that this utterance of an anguished heart may prove false. Amen!'

> My written resolve as above to don a robe and donate every pie to charity, the resolve of the moneylenders (due to the situation created by the war) not to make the sacrifice of even a rupee or a pie or suffer even a small loss and the resolve of my Aryan brothers to help me only if they can swallow me whole - I am completely roasted in the triple fires of these three resolves'. I have shot the inner working of the world on the film of my heart.
>
> At last a couple of ladies took pity on my toils and helped me by lending money selflessly for preparing a programme. A couple of friends gave additional help and as a result of the scheme, the livelihood of my staff could be taken care of. In short, after three years, making every effort, I made two solid programmes according to my desire and resolve, most painstakingly, with very little capital, and very small staff. I placed before the sons of Bharat a new "Raja Harishchandra" and "Lankadahan".

Dadasaheb had to face numerous difficulties during the First World War. Not only was capital not available, even raw film had become scarce. This was a new problem among others! The interest was piling up. The moneylenders were pressing him. Notwithstanding these difficulties from all sides, this dedicated artist did not stray from his goal. He confronted adverse circumstances with firmness and collected a little capital, but due to the insufficient supply of raw film, produced only two documentaries, titled *The Rock Carvings of Verul* and *The Glass Works of Talegaon*.

A little more capital became available. When moving from Mumbai to Nashik, the negative of *Raja Harishchandra* had been lost somewhere. So, when more raw film could be had, Dadasaheb filmed *Raja Harishchandra* again with almost the same script, cast and all other things. A mention of it is made in his article referred to earlier. This movie was first screened at the Aryan Cinema in Pune on 3rd April 1917, but its length was less by almost one reel, that is 2944 ft. as some portion was omitted. About the same time Dadasaheb produced a documentary, *How Movies Are Made*. One of the motives in making it was that some moneylenders might be willing to offer a loan on seeing it, but it did not serve that purpose. It was, however, worth studying as a documentary. The problem of capital cropped up again.

The effect of the appeal made to Lokmanya Tilak at the time of the Congress session in May was now beginning to be seen. After enough capital to start production could be had, Dadasaheb selected *Lankadahan*, a thrilling episode from Ramayana, for his next movie. He leaned heavily on trick photography in it. The audience found it amazing.

The casting of the main characters in *Lankadahan* was as follows: Ravan - Dattopant Dabke, Ram and Seeta - both Krishna Salunke, which was possible because the two did not have to appear together in any scene, Laxman - Krishna Achanikar and Maruti - Gangaram Shinde.

Much of the shooting of *Lankadahan* was done at Triambakeshwar. Eight bullock-carts would be ready with the technicians, artistes, other staff and necessary equipment, at 4 A.M. That was Dadasaheb's drive for work. He would himself be ready before the appointed hour. Dadasaheb, the photographer and the camera went in an old car. The shooting lasted from sunrise to sunset. The lunch for all was sent from Dadasaheb's home. What is more, they all took lunch together, along with Dadasaheb. He was always free and solicitous with everybody at lunch. On the job, however, he was quite strict.

The scene of Maruti's flight was astonishing. Mandakini Athavle told me, "There was an iron girder of eight to ten feet height under the *Bakana* tree. Three Marutis were asked to lie on it face down. When they started moving their hands and feet, shooting started. It appeared as if Maruti was going up, up and away. As the distance increased, Maruti's size naturally went on decreasing. The smallest Maruti was myself. A black curtain was hung in the background so that on the screen only Maruti was visible. The Maruti in any other movie went in a straight line horizontally, but in this movie he was seen going round and round and in opposite directions in the sky. Seeing it, the audience was wonderstruck".

'The platoon of giants' was also a scene worth seeing again and again. A platoon of a hundred giants was shown to imply that Ravan realises that hundred containers of his sins were full (so that his retribution was at hand). The scene showed that from the hands of a fierce-looking, huge giant, a demon comes out representing one container of Ravan's sins. Each demon was a metaphor for one container of sins. Many such trick scenes could be seen in *Lankadahan*.

Lankadahan too was first screened in Pune at Aryan Cinema on 17th September 1917. Its advertisement in the *Kesari* ran as follows:

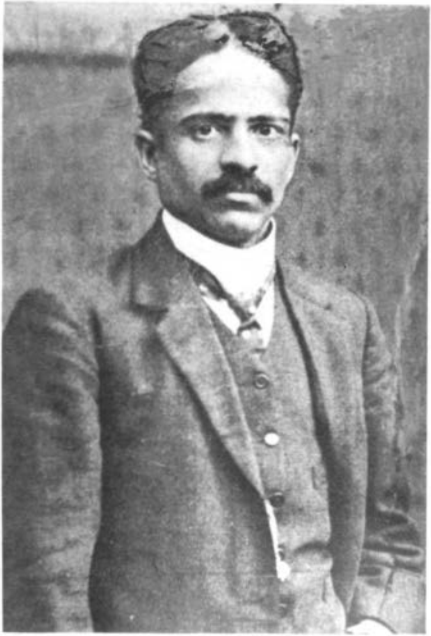
> 'Lankadahan', Parts 1 to 3 (The length of this movie was 3,000 ft., that is three reels) for only two days -Wednesday and Thursday, 19th and 20th September, Hartalika and Ganesh Chaturthi days. Besides, 'Dhaval Bhatji Begets A Son'. Figure out what it is. These movies will be screened for ladies and students on the 20th at 8:30 a.m. A student bringing a certificate from his school that he is its student will get a concession for the morning show.
>
> Daily six shows - First 8:30 a.m., second 3:00 p.m., third 4:00 p.m., fourth 6:00 p.m., fifth and sixth 8:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. respectively. Ticket rates range from 3 Annas to Rs 1.50. Reserve your seats to ensure admission.
>
> On Wednesday, the 19th, at the 4:00 p.m. show, Shri Phalke will be awarded a diamond-studded gold medal at the hands of Shri Paranjpe, M.P., on behalf of Aryan Cinema for his *swadeshi* art.

When *Lankadahan* was screened in Mumbai at the West End Cinema (now Naaz), there was a tremendous rush. To cope with it, the shows were held from 7 A.M. to 3 A.M. next morning. Even so, every show was 'house-full'. Phalke has written, "The shows at the West End Cinema in Mumbai earned Rs 32,000 in ten days. The rush at the Aryan Cinema in Pune was so uncontrollable that the crowd broke the theatre doors. At Madras (now Chennai) the earnings were so huge that the cash had to be carried in a bullock cart in sacks with police escort. Such an unprecedented sight was seen in India for the first time. About the same time, the movie *Harishchandra* of Maadan Theatres of Calcutta was screened at the Alexandra Cinema in Mumbai and Shri Patankar's *Prahlad* at Darbar Cinema".

In whichever city *Lankadahan* was screened, the queues of bullock carts bringing people to see the movie from the suburbs and the surrounding villages were so big that the traffic in the city came to a standstill. Many prospective viewers would sojourn in the city itself wherever they could. The number of such people too was quite large.

The late film producer, director and distributor J. B. H. Wadia remarked after viewing this movie, "After seeing *Lankadahan*, I did not think much of the western movies. I felt rightly proud that an Indian producer-director could produce such a movie". Shri Wadia was an M.A., LL.B. of those times and had stood first at the B.A. examination. He worked as a professor at the St. Xavier's College at Mumbai and also practised as an advocate later. The opinion of such a highly intelligent and highly educated person carried weight.

Similarly, Shri Ardeshir Irani, who produced the first Indian talkie *Alam Ara*, was also a director and an exhibitor himself. He viewed *Lankadahan* at Pune and predicted there and then, "This movie will have a phenomenal run and create a record". Dadasaheb wrote in an article, "For the sake



Dadasaheb in his youth.

Dadasaheb writing the script of a movie.

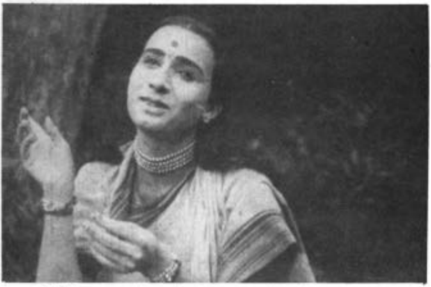
Dadasaheb doing the make-up of his son Bhalchandra for the role of Rohidas in the film *Raja Harishchandra*. Left: Dada Dabke in the role of Raja Harishchandra.

Dadasaheb teaching acting to Anna Salunke (Taramati) in the film *Raja Harishchandra*.

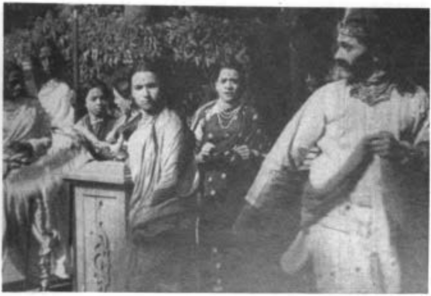
Dadasaheb editing a film.

A scene from Dadasaheb's humorous short film *Paws of Flour*.

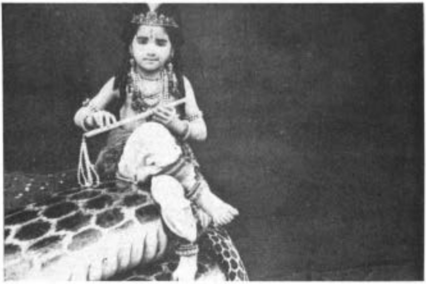
A scene from Dadasaheb's documentary *Sinhastha Parvani*.



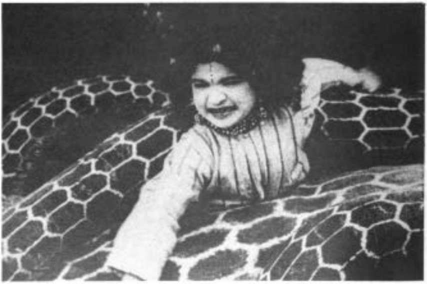
Anna Salunke as grief-stricken Taramati after she is separated from Harishchandra and Rohidas in the jungle. He holds the honour of being the first heroine of the Indian screen.



Seeta living in forest (Anna Salunke) upbraiding Ravan in the film *Lankadahan*.



Dadasaheb's daughter Mandakini—first child artiste of the Indian screen—as Shrikrishna in *Shrikrishna Janma*.



Shrikrishna (Mandakini) grappling with Kalia in *Kaliamardan*.

A scene from *Sant Tukaram*.

A spectacular scene from *Setubandhan*.

Dadasaheb Phalke at different stages of life.

of her husband, for his satisfaction, for being of help to him, she who was prepared to apply paint to her face because her husband was short of manpower, who not once but several times handed over her jewellery to me in times of financial distress, whose imperishable motto was that God should give me a long life as she had no desire for anything but my success and safety—it is due to the blessings of such a beloved wife that I am succeeding in my undertaking.

"By torching Lanka (Lankadahan) at the height of the war, I have torched the doubts on various fronts, commercial and all. Cinema theatres are again hopeful about indigenous movies. I am again having contracts for my old, new and future films. The movies are being screened in big cities like Mumbai, Calcutta, Madras, and Karachi as well as in small villages. Correspondence with western countries, which had come to a halt three years ago, has been resumed. In short, this business with a turnover of lakhs of rupees now stands firmly entrenched, with confidence, in front of Indians, abolishing all doubts and prejudices. The tree, which was withering for want of water, is again burgeoning. I have full confidence that, if need be, my brothers, with active sympathy, give this new art a fresh surge and flow and make not only our own India but the whole world enjoy Indian art". The readers are aware what difficulties, obstacles, indifference and neglect the Phalke Film Company had to face before *Lankadahan*. Despite all these odds, the company survived only because of the faith, perseverance and hard work of Dadasaheb and his honest co-workers. Movies were being produced, but their earnings were insufficient to cover the expenses of the organisation. In the production of the movies, Dadasaheb never economised, nor gave a thought to the money and time he spent on them.

Dadasaheb was unable to pay his employees for months together, salary was in arrears, yet Mama Shinde, Krishna Salunke, Dattopant Dabke, Gajananrao Sane, Triambak

Telang and his two worthy sons Nath and Datta Telang, Krishna Athavle, Datta Kshirsagar and other loyal co-workers, without hoping to be paid on time but feeling certain that they would definitely be paid one day, laboured honestly side by side with Dadasaheb, on only two meals a day. It is worth noting that Dadasaheb produced *Lankadahan* with the help of only these co-workers but with the confidence that some day or the other his hard grind was bound to bear fruit.

Because of the dazzling success of *Lankadahan*, some business-minded people began to feel that this industry was a money-spinner. As a result, many moneylenders, started repeatedly visiting Dadasaheb with moneybags, who, until then had to roam the streets seeking financial help. The goddess of wealth was now visiting his home of her own accord. Some persons expressed a desire to enter into a partnership with him in cinema industry. His well-wishers and especially his co-workers, however, were totally against his accepting any such partnership offer. In an emotional vein, they earnestly said to Dadasaheb, "Until now you implored many persons for money. No one gave you any quarter then. You suffered humiliation everywhere, had bitter experiences. Today those who are pleading with you with moneybags in hand, are not inspired by any love for an indigenous cinema industry, but by the opportunity they see for making money on the sly".

The utmost effort to popularise indigenous movies with the Indian audience was made first of all by *Lankadahan*. The audience viewed the movies that came before it, as a curio. This movie created an interest in indigenous movies among the audience. Their expectations went up. This was the magic worked by *Lankadahan*.

The year 1917 was the most important in the history of Indian cinema. In that year, 'Elphinstone Bioscope' a company of J. F. Maadan of Calcutta screened the full-length movie *Nal-Damayanti*. He had taken the help of Italian artistes and technicians. A couple, Mr and Mrs Maneli, had done the lead roles as artistes in that movie.

Among the founders of the cinema industry in the south, R. Natraj Mudaliar and R. Vyankatayya were the principal players. Natraj Mudaliar founded the Indian Film Company in Madras in 1917. It would not be wrong to say that *Lankadahan* inspired these pioneers.

Viewing the western movies and those of Dadasaheb, Anandrao Painter and Baburao Painter who were cousins, were obsessed with film production. They made their own camera. They were both great artists. They received valuable help from their student, Vishnupant Damle, a skilled artist and an engineer. This too happened in 1917, but Anandrao Painter died prematurely. Even so, Baburao formed the Maharashtra Film Company by the end of the same year. Up to 1917, however, Dadasaheb Phalke ploughed a lonely furrow and putting on the line every thing he possessed, exerted resolutely for this indigenous industry.

9

HINDUSTHAN CINEMA FILM COMPANY

Dadasaheb could understand the feelings of his colleagues who had advised him against partnership, but that would not solve the problem of capital. He was so deeply in debt that the fabulous earnings of *Lankadahan* were all spent in repayment of the loan. The only redeeming circumstance was that he was at last free from debt due to *Lankadahan* and the day and night gnawing worry had disappeared, temporarily at least.

But the million-dollar question, how to raise the capital for the next movie, still remained unsolved. Dadasaheb wrote in *Navyug*, "My worry, expressed in my article in *Navyug* had been read by Lokmanya Tilak. Shri Ratansheth Tata, Sheth Manmohandas Ramji and Lokmanya Tilak himself collected the necessary capital and prepared a scheme to make Phalke Films a limited company. I had meetings with Lokmanya Tilak in that connection at Pune and Mumbai and the draft was finalised..."

The value of Phalke Films was pegged at three lakhs. To stabilise the business, it was decided to make an additional investment of one and a half lakhs. It was also decided, in general, that in the proposed company Shri Phalke should have shares worth one lakh and a 75% share of the profits and the remaining 25% should be distributed among the other shareholders. However, the expectations of the partners who were shouting, 'Close the factory (studio)', 'Discharge the workers' as soon as the World War started, now increased on getting wind of the proposed limited company and, taking undue advantage of one of the clauses of the partnership deed, they used obstructionist tactics. The scheme could not, therefore, materialise. Lokmanya Tilak was distressed over it.

Lokmanya was aware of the power of the celluloid medium. A seer that he was, he unerringly guessed that this medium could reach the masses, that even an uneducated person would have no difficulty in understanding a movie and that there was no other as effective a means for mass awakening as movies. That was why he had tried to help Dadasaheb through the Paisa Fund. Due to the opposition of some malevolent people, however, that previous attempt of his had failed.

Phalke has written, "Some rich people wanted to help me financially. A special mention must be made in this connection of Fatima Begum of Mumbai. She came to Nashik to meet me along with her daughter Zubeida. (who later became the heroine of the first talkie *Alam Ara* of 1931.) Begum Fatima was prepared to offer one lakh rupees. We had meetings at her bungalow at Walkeshwar in Mumbai as well. Later, the Begum started her own film company in the era of silent movies. She was an actress herself. While talks with the Begum were still on, five industrialists expressed a heartfelt desire to jointly offer me some capital. As I found their offer more suitable, I thanked Begum Fatima and politely declined her offer".

The industrialists referred to above were: Waman Shreedhar Apte of Kohinoor Mills, Laxman Balwant Phatak, Mayashankar Bhatt, Madhavji Jesingh and Gokuldas Damodar. After all doubts were cleared, the paper work was gone through and Phalke Films was converted into Hindusthan Film Company. It is recorded that this event took place on 1st January 1918. Due to this massive financial help, Dadasaheb could construct a permanent studio at Nashik. The company now had six partners. Dadasaheb informed Lokmanya Tilak of all these developments.

While forming this company too, Dadasaheb's colleagues had once again given him heartfelt advice: "We have been working side by side for the last five years with great faith and without any expectation. Our faith has borne fruit in the shape of *Lankadahan*. Success is now ours. At such a juncture if, bearing the hardships a little longer, we work for some time with the same faith, we shall achieve still greater success. We shall stabilise our business without anyone's help. If you so wish, do not pay us for some more years. Note down our pay against our names and when the situation improves, pay us. Until that happens, we shall work for you as at present on two meals a day. We shall not mind hard work to whatever extent. But please do not take a partner in the business when success is at hand. Carry on the business single-handed. Even if we have to live literally from hand to mouth with you, we shall gladly do so". Dadasaheb did not, however, consider this advice to be practicable, as there was no possibility in the offing of getting capital of about thirty-five thousand rupees for the next movie.

From the very beginning, since the days of *Life of Jesus Christ*, Dadasaheb wanted to produce a movie on Shrikrishna. After such a long time, the day had dawned for that dream to be fulfilled. It was agreed on all hands to produce a movie on *Shrikrishna Janma* (Birth of Shrikrishna). For the role of baby Shrikrishna at different stages, he decided upon casting his children according to their ages: Babarai, Mahadeo and Mandakini. Other roles were allotted as follows: Kansa - Gajanan Vasudeo Sane, Vasudeo - Dattopant Dabke, Devki - Bal Vaidya of Indore, Ugrasen - Appasaheb Patwardhan, Narad - Krishna Salunke, Kansa's wife - Tarabai and Ganpat Gangaram Shirke.

In *Shrikrishna Janma*, there is an episode of christening (name-giving) ceremony of Shrikrishna. The five actors who always did female roles were ready, wearing sarees. But how would that be enough for such a big ceremony? Then every worker in the studio and any other willing amateur were all asked to wear a saree and get into the scene, including children! Even Dadasaheb's cook did not escape this conscription. Then it became a sizeable group. Although it was a punishment to see most of the faces in a woman's dress, there was no alternative. So Dadasaheb made them sit in such a way that only the backs of most of them would be seen. Actors doing female roles with somewhat better faces were made to sit in such a way that it would do if their faces were seen on the screen.

This movie needed a shot of a lotus. It was not, however, the season for lotuses and despite all their efforts no lotus could be had. But Dadasaheb was unstoppable. He took a big onion and cut it so skilfully that the audience thought they saw a lotus on the screen.

Trick photography was Dadasaheb's speciality. In *Shrikrishna Janma*, the angry and fearful Kansa, on learning that defying all the security system of his prison, Krishna had reached Gokul safely, sees Krishna everywhere in all directions. Furiously, he lifts his *gadaa* when he feels that all the Krishnas march towards him with spear, sword, wheel, bow and arrow and other weapons. In those days when even the words prism lens or optical printer did not exist, Dadasaheb took shots of Krishna from different angles on a single film and achieved the effect he wanted. This scene flabbergasted the audience. No one in even foreign countries had till then succeeded in filming such a scene.

Shrikrishna Janma was screened at the Majestic Cinema of Mumbai on 24th August 1918. Its length was 5,500 ft. that is six reels. There was a tremendous response to this movie too. In those days, this movie recorded a turnover of three lakhs. One more important thing happened at the time of this movie and that was the establishment of independent offices for film distribution at Mumbai and Madras. With this movie, Dadasaheb had produced 46 movies inclusive of his documentaries on various subjects.

10

CLIMAX OF *KALIAMARDAN*

Hindusthan Film Company's very first movie *Shrikrishna Janma*, directed by Dadasaheb Phalke, proved successful. He started considering the subject for the next movie. The story of how he conceived the subject of the next movie is interesting.

When Dadasaheb was in Pune, he was chatting with his friend, the owner of Aryan Cinema, Gangadharpant alias Bapusaheb Pathak. The question of Dadasaheb's next movie came up casually during the conversation. The movie *Shielding Shadow* was then on at the Aryan. It had a scene showing that a mammoth creature of the ocean breaks a ship into pieces. It was a thrilling scene. Bapusaheb Pathak suggested that Dadasaheb should show some such scene in his picture. Dadasaheb, therefore, saw the movie and the idea of *Kaliamardan* occurred to him. Besides, the life of Shrikrishna was Dadasaheb's favourite subject.

Mandakini Athavle (Mai) recounted her memories of the time:

> I was about six years old. I had just returned from school. The table was laid. I was sitting next to Dada. While we were eating, Dada started telling me the story of Kaliamardan. He told the episode of Krishna leaving the house getting angry with his mother, bowing to the house while leaving and starting for the river Yamuna. He narrated it so interestingly that I started weeping. After a while he asked me, "Sonu, will you do Krishna's role?" I joyfully agreed immediately.

Thus Mai got the lead role of Baby Shrikrishna. She was the first child artiste doing a leading role in the world of Indian Cinema. Other roles were done by: Nanda - Purushottam Parchure, Yashoda - Yadav Gopal Takle, Pendya - Narayan Pache.

The shooting of *Kaliamardan* started with the incident narrated by Mai above. Seeing Mai's realistic, emotional acting, all those present on the set had tears in their eyes. Dadasaheb was very appreciative of his daughter's acting and was confident that she would give a good account of herself:

> Outdoor shooting was on at the Gharpure *ghat* near Nashik. I was afraid of jumping into the deep water when Dada said, "Sonu, our livelihood is dependent on this cinema business. If you think that your father should get enough to eat, jump into the river without fearing for your life". Hearing this, I was so much worked up that I said, "Baba, if I have your permission, I am ready to jump even from the bridge instead of from the back of this man".

And the girl really did jump. Dadasaheb did not, for a moment, worry about what would happen to her. Mai continued, "I jumped into the water and went down and down. Fish entered my clothes, but I was not afraid. As soon as the shot was okayed, I was quickly taken out of the water. Really a dummy could have been used, but Dadasaheb made his own daughter do it".

Krishna and Kalia are struggling under water. Krishna tightly squeezes Kalia, which gives rise to bubbles in the water. Dadasaheb wanted to achieve this effect. For that purpose had got made a tank of glass. It broke and a shard entered Dadasaheb's foot. He started bleeding profusely, but he bandaged the wound temporarily and resumed work.

I got to read in one place that when outdoor shooting was going on at Vishali Depths on the Panchganga river near Shinganapur, an English curator was going to the Residency by a special aeroplane. As he was a cine-photographer, he came over to see the shooting. Dadasaheb requested him and took a shot from his aeroplane showing that a mammoth Kalia comes up from the depths of the river with Krishna dancing on top of his hood. There is no one living now to confirm this story. All those who saw this scene in those days were astonished.

Kaliamardan was screened at the Majestic Cinema of Mumbai on 3rd May 1919 that is exactly six years after *Raja Harishchandra*. The father and daughter duo were rightly extolled as Dadasaheb had got his daughter, who had never acted before, to give an excellent performance. Mai—Mandakini Athavle—was the first Baby Shrikrishna of the Indian screen! She says, "On public demand, I used to be dressed as Shrikrishna and made to stand on a small square platform at the Majestic Cinema. To see me as Shrikrishna in flesh and blood, throngs of viewers would gather there. When I walked in the streets, the devotees of Shrikrishna bowed down and touched my feet. I would be embarrassed. This happened in Mumbai every day for sometime. After my return to Nashik, I had the same experience".

Kaliamardan had such great success that there was a shortage of prints to meet the demand. It created a record by running continuously for ten months. For the next ten years, it continued to be screened at some place or the other in India. Writer V. P. Sathe says in an article, "Even as I was mesmerised by Phlke's *Lankadahan*, the same thing happened in the case of *Kaliamardan* too. Kalia, in particular, was so well done as to appear quite real. His mammoth figure made one shiver".

Just as the National Film Archives have two reels of *Raja Harishchandra*, they luckily have a complete copy of *Kaliamardan* too.* Shri P. K. Nayar, former director of the

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* They too have survived the recent fire at the National Film Archives as verified by the author. - *Translator*

National Film Archives, on being informed that at Dadasaheb's house some film tins were available, went to Nashik and found some tins wrapped in dusty pieces of cloth in a niche. Prabhakarpant Phalke gave them to him. They contained these rare and valuable reels.

This silent film of 6,000 ft., that is six reels, required eight and a half months after *Shrikrishna Janma* to be screened. This was because the artist Dadasaheb and the business-minded partners could not see eye-to-eye. Dadasaheb did not shrink from speaking without inhibition to his partners. He was a loner, eccentric, self-willed and short-tempered. He never could combine art and business acumen, which combination was one of the important reasons for the extraordinary success of Prabhat Film Company.

An unsavoury incident occurred at the time of the shooting of this movie. Dadasaheb had to make a number of retakes of a particular shot. One of the partners, L.B. Phatak, said to him, "If you go in for so many retakes of one shot and waste the film, how can the company afford it? If you waste the film in this way, the company will one day have to be liquidated and go into wilderness".

Dadasaheb was not a man to stomach such criticism. He retorted, "Phatak, you are a contractor by vocation. What do you know of film production? It is not as easy as counting brass measures of mortar. This is brainwork, which brain God has given me, not you. So, please keep quiet and do not compare expenditure on film with expenditure on mortar and poke your nose in my shots".

Dadasaheb started dressing down every partner who interfered with his work on grounds of business considerations, without caring for his status. Sometimes, from the business point of view, Dadasaheb too was right. For example, 36 copies each were needed of the films *Shrikrishna Janma*, *Lankadahan* and *Kaliamardan*. Mayashankar Bhatt's nephew, who was going to America for training in cinematography, took the negatives of all the three films with him for making the prints. Dadasaheb's argument was that there was no need to get the prints from America and incur unnecessary expenditure when the facility was available here.

Similarly, Capt. Rovan, an American, was appointed studio manager on a salary of Rs 1,700 per month. Dadasaheb did not like it at all that a company paying a minimum salary of Rs 15 and a maximum of Rs 100 should appoint an American manager on such a fat salary. This too led to a lot of argument.

Every man has some defects along with good qualities. How could Dadasaheb be an exception? The innate attitudes of Dadasaheb and the other partners were diagonally opposite. Dadasaheb's disposition was that of a true artist and he was not inclined to understand others' point of view or to compromise. He could never tolerate interference with his work. The expenditure he incurred and the time he spent over a thing had no restrictions. That was the real point at issue. It cannot, therefore, be said that the partners were always wrong. However, as Dadasaheb had so far produced financially very successful films by his own style of functioning, how would such a self-made man agree with or tolerate any mistakes pointed out in his methodology? Dissensions were, therefore, a natural outcome.

After producing two movies Dadasaheb realised that it was not possible to go along with his partners. To avoid daily bickering he decided to withdraw from the partnership, but his advocate brought to his notice that it was not easily possible. The agreement with Hindusthan Film Company had a span of 15 years and there was a clause in it that if Phalke left the company, he would not get a pie of the profits but, on the contrary, he would have to pay the company damages to the tune of Rs 50,000. He did not want to continue in the company in humiliating circumstances but due to the legal difficulty he could not leave it. That was the trap in which he found himself.

The partners too realised that if the dissensions went to the extreme and Dadasaheb ultimately left the company, who would shoulder his responsibilities? Being well versed in business tactics, they then called each of Dadasaheb's loyal colleagues: Mama Shinde, Krishna (Anna) Salunke, Gajananrao Sane, Triambakrao Telang and Datta and Nath Telang, separately. The idea was that this outfit of technicians and artistes, who had worked with Dadasaheb since the days of *Raja Harishchandra*, would definitely be able to produce movies. They diplomatically placed before those persons their plan.

"We do want Dadasaheb to carry on the company's business. If, however, he does not wish to continue and decides to leave, who can stop him? If that happens, we shall be facing a grave problem of how to carry on the company's work. We would not, of course, be affected adversely by closing the company. None of us is wholly dependent on the company. We are worried about loyal workers like you. If the company shuts down, you will be jobless. Think seriously about it and resolve to carry on the company if Dadasaheb leaves. If he leaves, we shall carry on, trusting you to deliver the goods".

Each of the workers began to consider the proposition in his own mind. 'So long, we stood behind Dadasaheb resolutely. Our deep respect for him will never diminish. Time has now come, however, to consider our own future. If Dadasaheb does leave, it would be in the interest of each of us to continue in the company. How long should we make our family suffer? With Dadasaheb we never got our salary on time. He could not help it. We cannot blame him. All of us stuck with him of our own accord, even in those days, due to our faith in him. We have, however, to think about ourselves at some point in time. The 16th of each month, the payday, was never missed in this company. Then why should we leave such a job? It is best to stick with the company.' All of them conveyed their decision to all the partners except Dadasaheb. Immediately, the partners got them to sign suitable agreements.

11

DADASAHEB PHALKE RENOUNCES FILM WORLD

The unstable situation continued for some days. There was no possibility of a rapprochement in sight. Ultimately, Dadasaheb decided to leave for some distant place for a long break and departed with his family for Kashi. He expressed his frustration in an article in *Navyug*. He wrote:

> Who am I? A father adding to the thirty crore slave population of India? The husband of my wife? A servant of the nation who has not yet repaid the debt of Mother India? A victim of the excessive thirst of moneylenders? An impractical man who has ruined his family, running after a chimera with body, soul and lucre? I must explain in detail the agreement, which destroyed a man's hopes and aspirations. I have got to tell my brother artists, for their own good, how we poor, needy craftsmen chain ourselves and then land ourselves in difficulty in the pursuit of our goals, due to lack of foresight or ignorance. The court will decide whether the agreement was proper or not. My only intention is to caution my brother artists about how I stumbled.

Actually, when leaving for Kashi, he should have received Rs1.25 lakhs as his share of the profits, but it might not have happened because of the agreement.

The local daily of Kashi, *Aaj*, published a report that Dhundiraj Govind alias Dadasaheb Phalke, father of Indian Cinema, had arrived in Kashi. As a result, many young men came to Kashi for obtaining information and guidance about film production. Among them were A.P. alias Anand Prasad

Kapoor and Abhaycharan Lahiri, who both earned a name as a director in Mumbai and Calcutta.

Babarai Phalke wrote a memoir in the issue of a cine-weekly, *Shringar,* dated 14th February 1953 about how Dadasaheb got the inspiration to write a play: 'Kirloskar Sangeet Mandali was staging its Hindi plays at Banaras at the time. The music maestro Master Manhar Barve was also camping there for his performances. Dadasaheb and the proprietor of Kirloskar Mandali, Shankar Bapuji Mujumdar, as also Master Manhar Barve's father Prof. Ganpatrao, were very old friends. So they met every day. About the same time the famous novelist Narayan Hari Apte was also in Kashi and he stayed with Dadasaheb. The foursome would discuss the merits and demerits of drama, cinema, music and literature. In one such meeting Dadasaheb declared his intention to write a play, *Rangbhoomi.*

Although Dadasaheb completed writing the play in about two and a half months, it seems that he meditated on the subject for many years. Describing the background of his play in the June-July 1922 issue of *Navyug* magazine, he wrote:

> With the grace of a few friends, this excellent play is staged making tireless efforts and spending about twenty thousand rupees for this one play. During its writing and also after the writing was over, it was read over to many respected and learned persons. The suggestions of many dramatists and playwrights made delicious additions to it. The experiences of renowned actors were incorporated in it in many places. The proprietors and managers of many drama companies kindly gave the benefit of their experience of 30 to 40 years to my *Rangbhoomi.* In order that the script of the play should be flawless, that my play may bring about an extraordinary revolution and the art of drama should prosper, they took me as a guest in their company and made me well acquainted with the internal management, difficulties, facilities, inconveniences and the atmosphere as a whole, which I was ignorant about. Equipped with all this material, on the basis of

> my own experiences and the aforesaid inputs, I crafted a lovely play, *Rangbhoomi*.

Hari Narayan Apte helped Dadasaheb quite a lot in writing the play. They disagreed, however, on many points and Dadasaheb completed the play according to his own idea.

The All India Congress Committee's session was to be held at Banaras in the last week of May. Lokmanya Tilak started from Mumbai on 27th May 1920 for attending it. Mahatma Gandhi was also on the same train. Lokmanya stayed in Banaras until 2nd June 1920. Dadasaheb inquired about the spare time Lokmanya Tilak and Dadasaheb Khaparde had during their stay and read out to them some scenes from his play *Rangbhoomi*. Lokmanya was pleased to listen to the apt criticism of the contemporary stage and assured Dadasaheb that he would inaugurate the show. Unfortunately, however, that was not to be. At the same meeting, Lokmanya commended Baburao Painter of the Maharashtra Film Company for the indigenous cine-camera constructed by him. Dadasaheb was already curious about Baburao Painter and Lokmanya's commendation increased his eagerness to meet him.

Dadasaheb's desire was soon fulfilled unexpectedly. He decided to meet *Rajapurkar Natak Mandali*'s proprietor Babaji Rane in connection with the staging of his play *Rangbhoomi*. The *Mandali* was at the time staging its shows at Kolhapur. Rane and Phalke were already very close friends. Dadasaheb went to Kolhapur from Banaras and lodged with *Rajapurkar Natak Mandali*.

During the Natak Mandali's camp at Kolhapur, Dadasaheb stayed with them. He regularly visited Ambabai's temple along with Babaji Rane. One day, they met Nanasaheb Sarpotdar at the temple. Nanasaheb was later a man of many parts such as a scriptwriter of movies, producer, director and founder of Poona Guest House. Rane introduced Sarpotdar to Dadasaheb as the scriptwriter of Maharashtra Film Company. Dadasaheb was very happy to meet a brother scriptwriter. More still, Nanasaheb had also acted in plays previously. Sarpotdar earnestly invited Dadasaheb to visit Maharashtra Film Company.

On the appointed day, Nanasaheb Sarpotdar took Dadasaheb to Maharashtra Film Company. Baburao Painter, Photographer and Art Director Vishnupant Damle and S. Fatehlal, and Manager Baburao Pendharkar suitably welcomed Dadasaheb. They showed him all the departments of the studio. Not only that, they also showed him their first movie *Sairandhri* which had been released a few days earlier and had been acclaimed throughout Maharashtra. The censors had objected to and cut off some portions of *Sairandhri*. They were restored for this occasion and the full, uncensored film was shown to Dadasaheb. They showed him the camera made by Baburao Painter, explained how it was made and what problems they encountered.

Great Artist Baburao Painter's imagination, insight and industriousness, moved Dadasaheb to tears and he said, "You have accomplished so much at the very start of your career that it would do for me not to re-enter the film world. It is very creditable that you have brought to reality my innermost desire to manufacture in our own country the machinery required for cine-production". Baburao too was overcome with emotion at the eulogy showered on him by the father of Indian Cinema. The meeting of the two great architects of Indian Cinema in an atmosphere charged with emotion was extraordinary.

Although professional drama companies wanted to stage *Rangbhoomi*, Dadasaheb did not give it to them but had it staged at the Baliwala Theatre of Mumbai in 1922 with great fanfare. In order to make the show perfect, he had organised rehearsals at the Aryan Cinema of his special friend Bapusaheb Pathak as also at Pathak's home for almost a year. However, the subject of the play, namely, deficiencies and problems of the stagecraft was incomprehensible to the general public. The expenditure incurred on this play seventy years back was what is spent on a 'big budget' play now-a-days, that is about 0.75 lakh. As the humour in the play was at the expense of the world of stagecraft, the audience did not understand it.

Rangbhoomi was a seven-act play. This led to the play being divided into two parts with four acts being staged one night and the remaining three the next night. The performances were held in only three cities, Mumbai, Pune and Nashik, but there was no response at all. Had this play been successful, Dadasaheb would certainly have made some definite contribution to stagecraft, but it turned out to be his first and last play. It burdened him once again with a load of debt. Even so, the world of drama took cognisance of his limited work by honouring him with the presidentship of the Drama Conference held at Kolhapur on 18th July 1926. Baburao Painter was earnestly in attendance to know Dadasaheb's thoughts on the subject of drama. Dadasaheb concluded his speech with the remark, "I turned to stagecraft with the intention of rendering some service to India through the medium of the stage, but I am in doubt myself whether that decision was correct."

The well-established producer, director, exhibitor and distributor of Calcutta, J.F. Maadan, purposely paid a visit to Dadasaheb when he was busy with the production of *Rangbhoomi* and requested him to return to the film world. Not only that, he even politely invited Dadasaheb to Calcutta to produce films. He also assured Dadasaheb of all the financial assistance he may need. Dadasaheb said to him, "I am fed up with the film business. I am not inclined at all to turn again to that path. Take it that I have renounced the film world". He thus declined Maadan's offer.

About this time, Achyut Balwant Kolhatkar, editor of *Sandesh,* wrote to Dadasaheb: "You are the father of the world of cinema. What are you up to? Should a father take to renunciation in a fit of holy rage? You better come back. The cinema industry, which you built up, needs you most earnestly. You started this indigenous industry making great sacrifices and passing through many ordeals. How then could you turn your back on it?" In reply, Dadasaheb informed A. B. Kolhatkar, "I am dead so far as the cinema industry is concerned and have no inclination to go back to it".

Sandeshkar Achyutrao Kolhatkar published Dadasaheb's letter under the heading, 'Dadasaheb Phalke Is Dead'. It caused a great commotion in Maharashtra. Many persons wrote to *Sandesh* urging Dadasaheb to return to the film world. *Sandesh* published all those letters and sent all the issues of the paper to Dadasaheb at Kashi. Reading those letters stirred Dadasaheb's heart and he felt that for the boundless love of his innumerable fans, he must give up his resolve. He acted accordingly and returned to Nashik but had not decided what to do next. He had only returned with the firm decision to go back to the cinema industry, which he had created.

12

RETURN TO THE HINDUSTHAN FILM COMPANY

Many developments took place in the Hindusthan Film Company after Dadasaheb Phalke went to Kashi. Mayashankar Bhatt, L.B. Phatak, Madhavji Jesing and Gokuldas Damodar did not pay attention to the affairs of the company as before so that much of the responsibility of movie production had to be shouldered by Waman Shreedhar Apte. The company's branch at Pune, Bharat Film Company, did not prove profitable. With Bapusaheb Pathak, proprietor of Aryan Cinema, as mediator, Waman Shreedhar Apte extended an honourable invitation to Dadasaheb to return to the company as Production Chief and Technical Advisor. Dadasaheb grasped the opportunity as his intention of going back to his own vocation would be realised. It must, however, be said that to accept the job on a salary of Rs 1,000 per month as an employee of the company was a compromise made by a proud Dadasaheb contrary to his nature. This remained an unresolved riddle. The year was 1922.

Dadasaheb stopped involving himself with any matter beyond the responsibilities entrusted to him. The first movie he directed after rejoining Hindusthan Film Company was *Sant Namdeo*, which was screened on 28th October 1922. He directed the movies as before, but he did not relish it. The earlier controversy continued: Art vs Business! Although Dadasaheb was an employee of the company, the staff treated him with the respect due to a partner. The partners too, notwithstanding the disagreements, treated him as an equal. He was not required to sign a muster. No restrictions were placed on him as on other members of the staff. Facilities like a horse-drawn cart for conveyance were placed at his disposal.

Notwithstanding all this, he found the business orientation of the company oppressive. Whenever there was a tiff, he would go home and return to work when he calmed down. If he left in the heat of an argument, the partners did not stop him and if he returned after a time, they did not object to it. In short, the doors were open for him to leave as also to return.

From the business point of view, Hindusthan Film Company had prospered. The credit for it goes to Wamanrao Apte. In Dadasaheb's absence, he got movies produced by Dadasaheb's trainees, namely, Gajananrao Sane, Mama Shinde, and Nirantar. Because of it, the company's monthly income amounted to Rs 40,000, whereas each movie cost about Rs 10,000. He had shown his intelligence and amiable nature in getting along with a short-tempered, proud artist like Dadasaheb without harming his business policy, which shows what a strategist he was.

Dadasaheb worked in Hindusthan Film Company until 1929. All the movies produced by the company in this period of about seven years were not, however, directed by him. Even while he was in the company, some of his trainees like G.V. Sane, Mama Shinde, V.S. Nirantar and Kashinath Bharadi also directed a movie occasionally.

Dadasaheb directed the following movies for Hindusthan Film Company:

1) Sant Namdeo, 2) Jarasandh Vadh, 3) Mahananda, 4) Babhruvahan, 5) Shishupal Vadh, 6) Ashvatthama, 7) Buddhadeo, 8) Gora Kumbhar, 9) Guru Dronacharya, 10) Kanya Vikraya alias Sharda, 11) Kalicha Narad alias

Ram-Maruti Yuddha, 12) Shivajichi Agryahoon Sutaka, 13) Municipal Nivadnuka and Vinchvacha Danvsh, 14) Syamantak Mani, 15) Hidimba Bakasur Vadh, 16) Kakasahebanchya Dolyat Zanzanit Anjan, 17) Chaturthicha Chandra, 18) Satyabhama, 19) Sant Eknath, 20) Janaki Swayamwar, 21) Bhakta Pralhad, 22) Bajaji Nimbalkar, 23) Rukmangad Mohini, 24) Nal Damayanti, 25) Hanuman Janma, 26) Draupadi Vastraharan, 27) Bhakta Sudama, 28) Rukmini Haran, 29) Shrikrishna Shishtai, 30) Parshuram, 31) Bhakta Damaji, 32) Malavika Agnimitra, 33) Chandrahas, 34) Vasantsena, 35) Bolki Tapeli, 36) Sant Mirabai, 37) Kach-Devayani, 38) Malati Madhav, 39) Ram-Ravan Yuddha, 40) Sant Janabai, 41) Shatmukhi Ravan Vadh, 42) Ramrajya Vijay, 43) Sudarshan, and 44) Kabir Kamaal.

This shows that most of Dadasaheb's movies were on mythological subjects, which was why he captured the Indian market. In seven years he directed 44 movies for Hindusthan Film Company that is generally about six per year. However, not much information is available regarding the production of these movies. Only a few stories, a narration about some episode in a movie, is all one gets to read. Even that shows Dadasaheb's characteristics such as creative imagination, character, dedication to his work and methodology. If he were doing a mythological movie or one on a saint's life, he would invite a learned, studious *kirtankar* and have a *kirtan* delivered by him on the subject. He would note any characteristic episodes in the story, which helped him when writing the script.

In the movie *Sant Eknath* of 1926, there is an episode of a procession of *sanyasis*. The actor doing the *sanyasi's* role was not, however, prepared to get his head shaved clean. He felt ashamed. So Dadasaheb, without getting irritated, got his own head clean-shaved. Then the actor and others in the procession got themselves clean-shaved for propriety's sake, if nothing else.

Dadasaheb was very particular in the use of time and words. Once their party was going from Nashik to Bhandardara for outdoor shooting. At Ghoti railway crossing, the vehicle stopped as the gate was closed. All got down as it was permissible (according to Dadasaheb's code). After a while the gate opened. Only one artiste who had gone to relieve himself failed to return. He could not be found nearby. Dadasaheb waited for five minutes, but as the artiste did not return, he ordered the party to proceed. A little later, the fellow returned, to find that the company's vehicle had left. When it returned after the shooting was over, he was picked up. From eight o'clock in the morning up to six in the evening, he waited near the railway gate, quite hungry. What could he have got to eat at that place? He could have gone to a nearby village but, for one thing, he had no money on him and secondly, if the shooting were to be over early, the vehicle would return to Nashik leaving him alone again. Due to this fear he waited at the Ghoti gate throughout the day.

There is an incredible instance of Dadasaheb's neatness, strict discipline and tidiness. Once he came to the studio for a rehearsal. Before starting, he went to his office and found that the inkpot was without its stopper. Hotheaded Dadasaheb lost his temper. He never tolerated even a little slovenliness. He set aside the rehearsal and asked all the staff to search out the stopper. He ordered that there would be no rehearsal until the stopper was found. It was, however, not found even after a long effort. So Dadasaheb cancelled the rehearsal for the day.

There is a scene in the movie *Bhakta Damaji* in which a page from Damajii's *pothi* automatically flies and falls at a distance. A page comes floating in the air and falls on the *pothi*. Then the page, which had fallen aside returns to its place and the other page is covered up. Dadasaheb himself filmed the happenings up to the point that the page comes floating in the air and falls on the *pothi*. He asked the photographer to film the happening of the page returning to its place. When he saw the scene in the rush-print, Dadasaheb thought that the photographer's shot was technically correct but he did not like it. He said, "There is no technical error, but a page of the *pothi* is a piece of paper. How would it float in a straight line? It would float in a zigzag manner and would assume different shapes. It must look like that". Dadasaheb who had an analytical mind and a studious and observant disposition, showed how to film that scene.

Another instance relates to an occurrence during the filming of the movie *Draupadi Vastraharan*: Dadasaheb completed the filming of the king's court scene and when he looked over the rush-print, the fact that there was one flat less, did not escape his sharp gaze. His fellow workers said, 'It is not noticeable'. But Dadasaheb was not one to compromise. It was only when he had the flat arranged and the whole scene filmed again that he was satisfied.

For outdoor shooting, once a locale was selected, the shooting was done there. If, however, Dadasaheb's artistic insight chanced upon a still better place nearby, the first shooting was cancelled and redone all over at the new place. Undoubtedly, a lot of time and money were spent on it!

The same year, in 1927, for the movie *Rukmangad Mohini*, Dadasaheb wanted a scene showing Rukmangad and Mohini's arrival by an aeroplane. He got a replica of an aeroplane made and tied by a rope in the studio for the purpose. He felt, however, that if the rope gave way, the plane would crash and an awful accident would take place. As a precaution, he got a net tied up as in a circus, some distance from the ground, in such a way that it would not show up in the camera. By coincidence, Dadasaheb's fear proved to be true. The rope broke and the plane crashed with Rukmangad and Mohini in it. Fortunately, due to the net, both the artistes were saved. The whole rigmarole had to be gone through again right from finding another rope to repairing the replica. Again everything was ready for the shooting. The artistes were, however, so scared that they were not prepared to board the plane. Finally, Dadasaheb himself flew in the plane, and then the artistes were willing to sit in it, albeit a little worried and Dadasaheb got the scene shot, as he wanted.

Of the movies Dadasaheb produced for Hindusthan Film Company, *Municipal Nivadnuka*, screened on 17th May 1924, deserves a special mention. It is seen that even in those days, elections were not far different from what they are now. The issue of *Navakal* of the same day published the following:

Whom will you give your vote? To the miser (Mr Datkore) or to the beggar (Mr Bhikmange)? Both these gentlemen-candidates promise to fulfil all your demands on getting elected to the municipality.

> *Municipal Nivadnuka* is a humorous movie replete with scenes, produced by Hindusthan Cinema Film Company to openly awaken the public to their rights and to caution them against those giving false promises!
>
> The movie shows how the different candidates for the municipal election employ various tricks to get the candidates of their party and caste elected.
>
> The two candidates of Kusumpuri, Datkore and Bheekmange have reached a climax. You may never have seen anything like the speeches they make and the awful things they do and the gimmicks they use for getting elected.

On 18th May 1924, the following placard was displayed at the Majestic Cinema: 'You will see exactly how madcap candidates under Phalke's special supervision resort to monkey tricks'. That way, the movie holds up municipal elections to ridicule, total and realistic. Thus the audience came to know Dadasaheb Phalke's sense of humour.

There is no doubt that Dadasaheb was hot-headed, but sometimes he showed the knack of how to get his job of shooting done with a cool head. I got to read about two incidents during the filming of *Draupadi Vastraharan* which show how work can be got done by tact, without losing one's head, when getting irritated would not only have failed to achieve it but, on the contrary, caused damage to the work.

A set of *lakshagriha* was being put up at the Tambat Ghat of Nashik. The work was almost complete, except for painting the ground suitably for the set. Some painters were put on the job, but Dadasaheb did not think it possible for the work to be completed by the time of shooting. He did not say a word. Instead, he took a brush and started painting the ground. He was a painter himself. Seeing that Dadasaheb had started painting, all the members of the staff too began to do so of their own accord and the job was finished in time.

In the same movie, a duel between two warriors had to be shot, but it was not getting into a vigorous fight. It looked like make-believe. Dadasaheb stopped the shooting and used a trick. He called each of the two actors aside separately and instigated them in such a way that when they stood facing each other for shooting, they were in a real frenzy, hurling abuses at each other. As it was a silent movie, the audience would not know what they were saying. Dadasaheb immediately started shooting and the two attacked each other with all their vim and vigour. He got the effect he wanted. As soon as the shooting was over, he called the two together, calmed them down and said, "Forget all that I told you. I lied to you to create temporary enmity between you to get a scene as we wanted for our movie. You too will realise it when you see it on the screen. I couldn't help it, I had to do it for the good of the movie. You be friends again as you were before". Astonished, they started looking at each other and at Dadasaheb. He smiled mischievously, but did not forget to commend them both.

Although Dadasaheb was in Hindusthan Film Company until 1929, he left it twice in the meantime. When he returned on the first occasion, the directors pegged his salary at Rs 500 per month instead of Rs 1,000 and Dadasaheb agreed to work on that salary. When he left for the second time and returned, they offered him a salary of only Rs 250, which too he accepted. How and why a self-respecting, principled, great technician-artist like Dadasaheb agree to this, not minding humiliation, have remained unanswered questions. Why did he suppress his natural instincts? He alone knew it.

It must be remembered that by the time of *Kaliamardan*, Dadasaheb had achieved dazzling success. His scintillating fame had spread throughout India. He was respected and honoured in the film world abroad as well. But although he directed a lot of movies thereafter, he did not achieve such enviable success. One reason for this could be that up to *Lankadahan*, he was all in all in his own company. Although he could produce movies in Hindusthan Film Company according to his own ideas, he had disputes with the partners. In his own company, he had problems to face, the main being that of finance. However, he surmounted those difficulties and produced memorable movies. In Hindusthan Film Company, finance was no problem, but due to the disagreements with the partners, he lost mental peace, which may have resulted in his inability to concentrate on his work as much as was necessary. If a director of a film has no inner peace, it is not possible for him to produce a superior work of art.

And this must be true, because the thought that instead of wasting his life in this manner in Hindusthan Film Company, he should again form a separate company, had raised its head. By that time, Wamanrao Apte alone was looking after the affairs of the Company. He was trying to go along with Dadasaheb as much as possible. However, it came to his ears that Dadasaheb was going to places like Mumbai, Indore, and Ujjain for raising capital and he noticed these activities too. He then strictly warned Dadasaheb: "You are an employee of the company. While in service, you are not expected to do any such thing. You have only two alternatives. If you want to carry on such activities, you will have to resign and if you want the job, these activities must stop immediately."

This dressing down was like a blow on his jugular. Apte's stinging words so nettled Dadasaheb that he immediately resigned the job in Hindusthan Film Company and left with the resolve never to return. From here on, the last chapter of Dadasaheb's film career began to unfold.

One point needs specific mention. The screening of Baburao Painter's movies started in 1920. As his movies were more realistic, artistic, spectacular and technically better, his influence had grown throughout India. Moreover, those who later formed Prabhat Film Company and earned world-wide fame, like V. Damle, S. Fatehlal, V. Shantaram, were best students of Baburao Painter. They had the co-operation of writers like Nanasaheb Sarpotdar, N.H. Apte, Shivram Washikar, Vishnupant Aundhkar, N.S. Phadke and Bhalji Pendharkar. Dadasaheb, on the other hand, managed all departments of film production himself, single-handed.

13

SETUBANDHAN AND *GANGAVATARAN*

The late Ganpatrao Tambat who worked as an actor in Dadasaheb's movies and was later recruited as an actor by Prabhat Film Company on Dadasaheb's recommendation and did important roles in Prabhat's movies, told me some stories about the movie *Setubandhan.*

For floating a new company, Dadasaheb called on Mayashankar Bhatt, a former partner of Hindusthan Film Company, and apprised him of his intention to form a new company under the name and style of 'Phalke Diamond Company'. Mayashankar Bhatt had no doubt about Dadasaheb's ability but everyone knew well that his expenditure had no limits. Everyone also knew that the money was never spent on luxuries, that every paisa was spent solely on film production. Dadasaheb was firm, insistent, even obstinate in ensuring that his movies should be spectacular, the atmosphere should be realistic. In view of all this, Mayashankar Bhatt agreed to provide a capital of Rs 50,000, but an important condition was that the movie must be completed within that amount. Dadasaheb accepted it and made preparations for producing a film on the *Setubandhan* story in the Ramayan.

Dadasaheb brought about half a dozen well-built wrestlers from Wadi Bundar in Mumbai for the roles of giants and selected a big-bodied wrestler named Wagh from a gymnasium at Dadar for Maruti's role. (Later, Haribhau Lonari did this role.) He could not, however, get a suitable woman for the role of Sita. In the meantime, the shooting of different sculptures at Humpi and other places near Madras was completed.

Earlier, a good-looking young woman had called on Dadasaheb. She wanted to do the role of Sita. Dadasaheb too thought her suitable for the role. She, however, asked Dadasaheb, "If you give me Sita's role, will I get brocade sarees and lots of jewellery to wear?" Dadasaheb explained, "The Sita in my movie is staying in a jungle. She will wear rough clothes. How can Sita wear jewellery when living in a jungle?" Hearing this, the lady declined to do the role. Although ladies had started acting in films by that time, it was difficult to get a suitable female artiste for a particular role.

The joke regarding the lady who came for Sita's role is yet to be told. She asked Phalke, "Will you give a role to my elder sister? She is cast in a big mould, can ride a horse, is an expert swimmer and climbs trees swiftly". Dadasaheb asked, "What role can I give to your sister?" She replied immediately, "What role? Maruti's wife's, of course! She will be quite fit for that role". Dadasaheb thumped his forehead in disgust and sent her away saying, "Okay, I'll let you know." (Everybody knows that Maruti was a celibate.)

On his way back from Madras, Dadasaheb had brought with him a young lady from Belgaum, named Malati, passably handsome, for the role of Sita. He was determined to make magnificent, artistic sets, appropriate to the period of Ramayan. He had planned to make the sets in the image of the temples and sculptures he had photographed in the south.

The whole staff was busy erecting the sets. There was no system then for the staff to do only specific work. The work was going on at full blast. Something big was taking shape. Dadasaheb laboured hard and could scarcely get three or four hours of sleep. However, he lost sight of the fact that the whole show had to be accommodated within the given amount and the capital got exhausted while the movie was only half finished. Mayashankar Bhatt was not prepared to invest more capital. All activity came to a standstill. The work accomplished so far by boundless efforts was on the verge of being wiped out. Efforts to get more capital did not succeed. Workers' salaries slid into arrears. Once again, Phalke had to face a financial crisis.

A year went by and there was no sign of the movie being completed. In Phalke Film Company, workers' salaries remained unpaid over long periods, but Dadasaheb's co-workers then had such loyalty that they would not let the company shut down, come what may. Now, however, Dadasaheb found it difficult day by day to sustain the company and carry on the work with workers' dues in arrears. No solution was in sight. The workers started pressing him for their salary. He was fed up. Annoyed by their attitude, he placed the keys before them and said, "Take this company and its property in your possession. Sell it and recover your dues. I am ready to leave along with my family with only the clothes we have on. I do not see any other option".

Thus we get an idea of how daunting and in what different ways this father of Indian Cinema had to suffer misfortune. In these dire circumstances, it was the compassionate Wamanrao alias Tatyasaheb Apte alone who came to Dadasaheb's rescue. Tatyasaheb was pleased to see the sets erected by Dadasaheb. Although Dadasaheb had left Hindusthan Film Company with the resolve never to return to it, he had no other way but to grasp the helping hand offered by Apte. Just as Apte stood behind Dadasaheb by letting bygones be bygones, Dadasaheb too was compelled to accept Apte's help by allowing the past to bury its dead. Accordingly, Apte took possession of Dadasaheb's studio near Balaji's chawl at Nashik and removed all the goods and effects to Hindusthan Film Company. Workers received their arrears of salary from the Company. Dadasaheb too became a partner of the Company again on some conditions. It was decided to complete *Setubandhan* at Imperial Film Studio of Mumbai under the banner of Hindusthan Film Company. All staff and effects were transferred to Mumbai.

When going to Mumbai, Dadasaheb took with him forty well-built youths appropriate for the roles of giants and monkeys. Ganpatrao Tambat was also among them. All of them were taken one day to the Imperial Studio for make-up. Seeing this gang of ruffians wearing dhoti, shirt, coat and cap, the actors and staff of Imperial Studio started making fun of them saying, 'From where have these ruffians come?' Nanasaheb Sarpotdar was at that time directing Imperial's movie *Devki*. Bhaurao Datar was doing an important role in it. Dadasaheb had first brought Bhaurao Datar to the screen in his silent movie of 1924, *Agryahoon Sutka*, in the role of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. Later, in the era of talkies too, he made a name in that role. He warned the Imperial Studio people, "Don't make fun of them. These men do not talk. They will knock you down with wrestling finesse, you understand?" The fun-seekers shut up. When the make-up and costumes were done, the whole studio personnel turned out to see the sculpted physique of this youthful gang. Since then everybody started addressing them as 'Brother'.

Everything was in place and shooting was started, but Dadasaheb's string of misfortunes continued unbroken. After about six days' shooting, an actress named Iqbal, doing the role of Mandodari, requested Dadasaheb to allow her to go to Calcutta, promising to return after completing about three days' shooting of another movie there, so that that movie could be completed. Dadasaheb thought that in her absence he would shoot a few scenes in which she did not figure and so gave her permission to go. She did not, however, turn up even after two months. If she were to be replaced by another actress, the shooting already done would have to be cancelled and the sets re-erected, which would have been a very costly affair. Letters and telegrams were sent to her, which received no response.

About a week after Iqbal left, waiting for her return continued from day to day. The gymnasts' gang of forty continued camping in Mumbai. If Iqbal did return, they should be at hand; so they could not be sent back. Their daily routine included exercise in the morning and evening, full complement of nutritious diet and two delicious meals at Arya Pathikashram. Besides, as they had nothing to do, they put on weight and looked like real titans. The huge expenditure on them had inevitably to be borne.

After Iqbal's return, shooting started again. A few memoirs of Dadasaheb about this movie have been published. It had been decided to reach the location at *Pandav Leni* at exactly 5 a.m. for outdoor shooting. Dadasaheb, as was his wont, reached there exactly on time. However, the car bringing the artistes arrived about twenty minutes late for some reason. Dadasaheb lost his mood, cancelled the day's shooting and sent the vehicle back.

Babanrao Suryawanshi did the role of Angad. In one scene, he had to jump from a tree. He did not even know how to climb a tree, but he could not say 'no' to Dadasaheb. He somehow climbed the tree with the help of others. In order to avoid injury to him, a net had been spread below the tree so as not to appear within the frame of the camera. Even so Suryawanshi was afraid of jumping from such a height. When the camera started he jumped, but first closed his eyes due to fear. Actually, due to the speed of falling, the audience would not have noticed it, but it did not escape Dadasaheb's eye. Supposing some alert viewer notices it? In Dadasaheb's view, the person would think that it did not behove a brave Angad to be afraid while jumping. He decided, therefore, to repeat the shot. The photographer and others said that nobody would notice it, but Dadasaheb did not agree. Suryawanshi was again put up on the tree. This time he was very particular to keep his eyes open and the shot was okayed. This instance shows that Dadasaheb never okayed a shot unless he was completely satisfied. He was very particular that there should not be the slightest mistake.

Some outdoor shooting for *Setubandhan* was to be done at the seashore at Ratnagiri. Very good quality fish could be had there cheap. The company's meals were purely vegetarian. So non-vegetarians collected money by subscription and cooked their food in a corner. As Dadasaheb was strictly vegetarian, the non-vegetarians sat down for the meal separately, thinking he would not like to eat with them. Dadasaheb did not like this segregation at all. Although he was very strict at other times, he had his meals with all of them. When he saw the segregation, he frankly said, "I have no objection to your eating fish, but I am opposed to your segregation. If you eat fish sitting with me, the fish bones will not prick me, nor will my religion be defiled. Don't be so foolish again. Come on, join me". Thereafter so long as the shooting went on, all had their meal together. Dadasaheb did not observe the caste system. The company's staff included people from different castes. If Dadasaheb lost temper with anyone, he would forget it after a little while. Those who knew this, did not take his tongue-lashing seriously, no matter how severely he chastised them.

Setubandhan showed that Dadasaheb's creativity and skill in regard to trick photography was extraordinary. In that movie a giant's head is severed from the body and reattaches itself to the body by weird powers. The audiences of those times were astounded, seeing it.

In Imperial Studios Dadasaheb had to shoot the scene of a waterfall. He asked for a lot of sand and some heaters.

Seeing the fuss and fluster, the people in the studio joked, 'The old man has lost his mind'. No one could imagine what he was going to do with all the sand and the heaters. Dadasaheb, by skilfully throwing the sand constantly on the artificial waterfall in the studio, created spray as in a real waterfall and with the heaters he created the sound effect. Seeing this scene on the screen, everyone was dumbstruck. Dadasaheb had made the artificial waterfall real.

In the filming of *Setubandhan* and, later, *Gangavataran*, Dadasaheb's son Babarai proved his merit. Dadasaheb felt certain that Babarai would carry forward his tradition. He had that mental satisfaction and wrote an article in *Mouj* praising Babarai's prowess. But fortune frowned. Dadasaheb did not have this pleasure for long. Death swooped on Babarai prematurely and the Phalke family was subjected to another fatal blow.

Mention must be made of Dadasaheb's one more trick scene in *Setubandhan*, which shows his artistic perspective for true representation. He had made artificial stones of cardboard moulds that floated on water and appeared real on the screen. As the scene was shot imaginatively from a particular angle, the monkey-army appeared to be crossing the sea over them right into the horizon. In order to make the scene realistic, Dadasaheb did much of the shooting at Rameshwar. *Setubandhan* had taken two years to complete. By that time, the era of talkies had opened in India by the screening (14th March 1931) of Imperial's Hindi talkie *Alam Ara*. In a year's time, *Ayodhyecha Raja* of the foremost Prabhat Film Company and, incidentally, the first talkie in Marathi, was screened (6th February 1932). A week earlier, its Hindi version had been screened. This first talkie of Prabhat was making waves all over India. Sensing that silent movies had now no future and in view of the fact that the fifteen-year agreement with Dadasaheb was coming to an end, Wamanrao Apte decided to dissolve the company. Not only did he pay the workers' salaries to the last paisa, but also gave them a bonus equal to an year's salary and retired honourably from the cinema industry. A large-hearted director of a film company like him will not be born again.

As *Setubandhan* was a silent movie, it was difficult to get a theatre to screen it as the talkies had captured all the theatres. What next, was a big question. Hindusthan Film Company was closed but, like other members of the staff, Dadasaheb too had received full month's salary plus a year's salary as bonus. Ardeshir Irani of Imperial Film Company suggested a way-out by adding sound to *Setubandhan* in his studio. Dadasaheb acted on it. It cost forty thousand more. Dadasaheb Phalke was thus also the first to dub a movie. However, this movie was dubbed in Hindi. It was 1934 when *Setubandhan* was screened, that is, it took three long years. It could not survive the competition of other movies and the huge expenditure incurred on it was a loss. Dadasaheb was again overtaken by financial problems.

Thereafter Dadasaheb experimented with enamelling and ceramics. His products were awarded prizes by the princely state of Aundh and at the Industrial Exhibition in Mumbai. Although the expenditure on *Setubandhan* was seventy-five thousand rupees, much of it was recouped by the screening of the silent movie in the south in 1932. However, due to the loss of two years in adding sound to it, the expenditure incurred on the addition was a burden on Dadasaheb due to the failure of the movie at the box office.

GANGAVATARAN

Thinking that if a world-renowned film director like Dadasaheb Phalke produced a talkie for his Kolhapur Cinetone it would benefit both, the Maharaja of Kolhapur state, Rajaram Maharaj, extended an honourable invitation to him in December 1934. However, Dadasaheb was such a terror that not only in his own company, but even in Hindusthan Film

Company, no one dared approach him chewing *paan* or smoking a cigarette or *bidi*. Not being sure that in the princely state he would be able to maintain such a strict code of discipline, Dadasaheb declined the invitation.

The Maharaja of Kolhapur did not, however, give up. At last, Dadasaheb agreed somehow to the proposal. A deal was negotiated between the two. For writing the story, script etc., Dadasaheb was to get Rs 1500, for direction 10% *sanad*, and Rs 450 per month for his expenses. It seems that this deal was not reduced to writing. Dadasaheb had intended to take up the subject of *Gangavataran* for Hindusthan Film Company and had written the story too for the purpose. It was decided to take up the same story for Kolhapur Cinetone.

For writing the script and the dialogues Dadasaheb took the help of his close friend N.H. Apte. As in the case of his play *Rangabhoomi*, he composed the musical score too along with the music expert Vishwanathbuwa Jadhav. Of particular interest is the fact that Dadasaheb also wrote the lyrics for this movie. There were, in all, 17 songs. Leela Mishra, who later made a name in the world of Hindi films, did the role of Parvati. Shanta Hublikar, who did a memorable role in Prabhat's *Manus* (Admi), had a very insignificant role in this film. Kalamaharshi Baburao Painter lent a helping hand. *Gangavataran* was produced in both Marathi and Hindi.

There were trick scenes galore. Much of the credit for it goes to Babarai Phalke. A horse flying in the sky, ghosts disappearing in a pitcher, two heads severed from their bodies praising god Shankar in songs, the river Ganga descending to earth from heaven, a man drinking from a waterfall while floating in the air, some four hundred persons coming out of a pitcher singing, the river Ganga which descended from heaven to earth going around Shankar's matted hair and then the matted hair surrounding the flow of Ganga-the movie was full of scenes like these.

At the age of 65-66, Dadasaheb's enthusiasm was undiminished. He was not lacking, at the time of this movie, in putting in tireless effort. At the time of the filming of the Girsappa Falls, he filmed the Falls and climbed the steep mountain ahead of all with the vigour of a young man for deciding from where and how the surroundings should be filmed. He did the shooting till the evening and descended the difficult slope quite speedily.

Dadasaheb's lack of foresight was glaringly evident at the time of this movie too. He wanted to shoot some episodes in the Himalayas. It was not possible to afford a trip to the Himalayas, so Dadasaheb came up with an impractical idea. He visited the hills around Kolhapur and found the Ramling hill suitable for his purpose. He then ordered the art department to paint the whole hill white in order to get the effect of snow-clad Himalayas. Kalamaharshi Baburao Painter as well as other technicians advised him that this shooting could be done in the studio by erecting a set as required. Dadasaheb, however, was of the firm view that the grandeur of the scene that he wanted could not be had in a studio set and he had his way.

The whole hill was painted white. It was decided to shoot the film there the next morning at sunrise. But oh! It rained heavily during the night and the painted hill looked as it was before. It was impossible to speedily repaint the hill soaked in the rain. Ultimately, the shooting had to be done in the studio with sets. I had only heard this story. The venerable art director of Kolhapur, Bapusaheb Pawar, who worked in the art department of Kolhapur Cinetone at the time of *Gangavataran*, told me that the story was true. He was one of the workmen who painted the hill. This indiscretion of Dadasaheb later became the butt of a joke. Vishram Bedekar's autobiography *Ek zaad, don pakshi,* contains a wrong statement: "In one movie Baburao Painter had painted a whole hill for the scene of Himalayas". I have brought it to his notice.

When Dadasaheb experimented in this manner in his own company, nobody could question him. Because of his temper, no one dared advise or suggest anything to him. But later, although he was a partner in the company, the other partners would question him about such wasteful expenditure. It did lead to quarrels. The same thing happened in Kolhapur Cinetone. There was a lot of hot arguments in connection with the painting of the hill. Besides, due to the ways of working of a princely state, there were needless obstructions in Dadasaheb's work. He completed the filming of *Gangavataran* somehow and returned to Nashik even before a copy of it was ready.

He had no regrets for the wasteful expenditure he incurred on translating into reality the Himalayas of his vision. He never minded the waste of any amount of money spent on trying to materialise his ideas. It must be remembered that it was because of this mindset that he often actualised what appeared impossible. He showed on the screen several trick scenes, which would lead anyone to appreciate his sharp intelligence and imagination.

Gangavataran took two years to complete and cost two and a half lakhs in those days. It was screened at the Royal Opera House in Mumbai on 6th August 1937. It was the first Indian talkie screened there. Maybe because relations between the princely state and Dadasaheb had gone awry, he did not get the agreed amount. After the movie was screened, Dadasaheb was once walking past Royal Opera House. The compound of the theatre was full but Dadasaheb's pocket was empty. After *Gangavataran* was exhibited, Sir Rahimtullah met Dadasaheb and offered to spend any amount of money for film production. Any practical man would have immediately accepted the offer, but a frustrated Dadasaheb declined it on the ground that he was not keeping good health.

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LAST DAYS OF THE FATHER OF INDIAN CINEMA

Gangavataran was the only talkie directed by Dadasaheb. Thereafter he did not involve himself with film production. After this movie was completed, he stayed for about a year with Narayan Hari Apte at Koregaon for peace of mind. Then he moved to Pune, where Nanasaheb Sarpotdar made efficient arrangements for him in Poona Guest House with respect and solicitude. Negotiations were on for Prabhat Film Company to produce documentaries, newsreels and educational films with Dadasaheb in charge of the department. An honorarium of about two hundred and fifty rupees per month was also paid to him. He rented a room for Rs 10 per month in Dole's bungalow. After some days he moved to Vaidya Wada. However, Prabhat's scheme did not materialise.

The first Indian movie was screened in May 1913. It was, therefore, decided to hold the Silver Jubilee celebrations of Indian Cinema in May 1939 in Mumbai. Naturally, the father of Indian Cinema was invited to be the chief guest. My brother-in-law, one of the founders of Prabhat Film Company, administrator, sound recordist, director and technical expert Vishnupant Damle, who brought me up as his son, took both of us, his eldest son Anantrao Damle and me, to the function. Each company had erected its stall, embellishing it according to its ideas. The most outstanding was Prabhat's artistic and beautiful stall and Ranjit Movitone's mascot, 'horse', that stood at a great height.

On that occasion, Damle took us to Dadasaheb Phalke and said, "This is Dadasaheb Phalke. He started the cinema industry in our country". How would we know then how great, how extraordinary this man was? We were just school-going children then. I was fifteen. I bowed to Dadasaheb, bending before him in the traditional way. He patted my back. I was not old enough to understand the majesty of the moment when the father of Indian Cinema patted me. Now I understand the singularity of that experience.

All that followed was startling. Some big shots in cinema industry were strutting on the dais. The president of the function Satyamurti and special guest Governor Sir Roger Lumley appeared on the stage, but the main celebrity was not to be seen. Dadasaheb sat among the audience on one side, unobtrusively, wearing a dhoti, shirt, cotton coat and cap! He was not even introduced to the Governor. Baburao Patel, founder-editor of *Film India,* the most popular cine-periodical of the time, and others brought this to the notice of the organisers. Then there was some hectic activity. Prithviraj Kapoor led Dadasaheb to the dais holding his arm, with great respect and affection. But even there, he sat at the end of the row. As the function started, every speaker lauded Dadasaheb no end for his dazzling work, his achievements, and his loyalty to his ideals. After all speeches were over, Prithviraj Kapoor got up spontaneously, faced the mike and declared, "My friends of the film world, the great man whose praise you just heard for so long, father of Indian cinema Dadasaheb Phalke, is sitting there—look!" and as he pointed to Dadasaheb sitting at the back of the dais with head hanging down, there was a thunderous applause. *Film India* published a photograph showing the humiliation and indifference displayed towards Dadasaheb and also published a caustic article about it.

Dadasaheb had brought with him a prepared speech as follows:

> *I am now running seventy. I do not know whether I should be glad or sad for God's keeping me alive for seventy years. If I look at my long life from a perspective of happiness, I am really experiencing heavenly joy. On this occasion, I think of Shakuntala of Mahabharat and her foster father Kanva Muni. She grew up in the hermitage of a poor hermit, Kanva Mahamuni. She grew up on cereals and roots and wore barks of trees for dress. The same is the case with my daughter, the Cinema. The joy that I feel today is the same or even more than the joy Kanva Muni felt on seeing Shakuntala as a young maiden, dressed up in royal splendour. My daughter, the Cinema, too grew up in poor circumstances. Now she is in the company of princely pelf. Forty to fifty maidservants are unhappy if they do not get a chance to serve her. Artists in more than two hundred industries are exerting to serve her.*
>
> *Seeing such a wealthy daughter and her twenty-fifth birthday, that is, her 'Silver Jubilee' being celebrated with such fanfare as would make even a prince blush, which father would not feel fulfilled? Which father's eyes would not moisten with joy? However, where there is light, there is shade. The allure of wealth is so extraordinary and those possessed by it get so blinded that they do not recognise even their parents. That is what has happened to my daughter, the Cinema.*
>
> *Leaving my poor hermitage at Nashik when she stepped in the alluring city of Mumbai, she was dazzled and her unbridled pranks started. The extent of her wealth-induced blindness went so far as to question me, in a daze of affluence, 'Who are you? You, my father? I do not know you. Because of my fame and riches, many have petitioned me for my fatherhood. You may be one of them'. She uttered such vile language. In the meantime, an extraordinary thing*

happened which helped open her eyes. Many of the servants and maidservants attending on her chanced to see her father wandering with his family away from his home and crying out, 'O my daughter! My daughter!' On making inquiries, they came to know that many honourable men had looted her father's hermitage. The trees and bushes on the roots of which she fed herself had been completely rooted out and that her hermit father had no tree left to clothe himself from its barks. Her father's hermitage had turned into a barren piece of land.

Hearing of her father's wanderings and famished condition, she was distressed. She thought a little and said, 'My countrymen, where am I? What am I doing? I seem to have lost myself. I will soon hold a congress to get my life analysed. Until then, do not bring my father to me. For the present, take this bowl, go to the people all over India who love my father and collect a purse fund. Do something so that my father can go and meditate in a holy place. See that he is not put to hardship. Whatever happened cannot be undone.

The daughter is doing and will do everything just and proper for her father. However, I pray to God that at least for sometime in the future let there not be born in India crazy persons like me who are pious by nature, straightforward in dealings, have boundless love for art, make sacrifices for art to any extent and for whom art is the only ideal.

Dadasaheb stood up to speak amidst spontaneous applause. He started to speak: 'My dear ones…' and his voice choked. He could not continue. Gajanan Jagirdar, sitting next to him, noticed his condition. Holding Dadasaheb, he made him sit in the chair and read out his speech, but he too was overcome by emotion when reading the last portion of the speech. He has written about this incident where he says, "The last few lines wounded my heart like a sharp weapon. They expressed all the aches and pains, all sorrows and joys of Dadasaheb's life in words most touching. Even at this moment the same personality stands before my mind's eye—cramped, eyes full of tears!"[6]

Since Prabhat's *Ayodhyecha Raja*, I have known Durgabai Khote. We met occasionally thereafter, but more often since she went to stay at Zirad near Alibag. A few months before she passed away, she mentioned the unpardonable insult meted out to Dadasaheb on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee, with tears in her eyes.

For the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of Indian Cinema, a Phalke Purse Fund Committee was formed. It presented a purse to him that day which contained a sum of Rs 6,250 and 07 Annas, comprising Rs 1,200 from Prabhat Film Company and Rs 500 each from New Theatres and Ranjit Movitone. Other institutions seem to have made a nominal contribution.

In December 1939 Dadasaheb addressed the producers in the Indian Film Industry from the Mumbai station of All India Radio. In that speech he reminded them of their responsibility. Until then he rarely attended any meetings or get-togethers. He went only to see movies. But now he started getting invitations for delivering speeches. On 20th July 1920 Dadasaheb inaugurated Kishor Sahu's movie at The Excelsior in Mumbai. On 22nd July, he went with his wife to Madras and from there to Calcutta. In the meeting at the 'Chamber of Films' in Madras, he enunciated five principles of film production:

1. Remembering that movies are basically a 'photo play', the scenes should be arranged when writing a script as if it is for a silent movie. Dialogues should be kept to the essential minimum.
2. The length of the film should not be allowed to exceed 9,000 ft. An educational or travel documentary or a cartoon should by all means be shown along with the main feature.
3. Do not create an atmosphere of western style razzmatazz inconsistent with our culture in Indian social movies.

4. Do not pay the artistes more than what they deserve. Let there be no comparison with the American artistes in that respect. Their movies have a worldwide market. Instead of competing with them in artistic merit, if you try to compete with them in financial matters, you will be broke.
5. And most importantly — keep aloof from addictions. A healthy mind and a healthy body alone will produce movies suitable for development of the nation.

During his visit to Calcutta, the *Deepali* weekly invited Dadasaheb specially to felicitate him in their office. On that occasion the editor of *Deepali* discussed with Dadasaheb Mahatma Gandhi's view mentioned below which was published in the issue of his weekly dated 16th June 1939. He had said, like a seer, "Movies will be produced in future on Gandhi, but this Gandhibaba will not be there to see them". Gandhiji's secretary had sent a letter on these lines in reply to a request for Gandhiji's message by a newspaper of Mumbai for the silver jubilee of Indian Cinema.[7]

Dadasaheb would say while *Gangavataran* was under production, "This is my last movie. It's enough. I wish that my movies should not be praised just for the sake of it. They should also be rightly criticised without fear or favour so that the errors and defects pointed out by knowledgeable persons would provide guidance to other producers and directors". Was it not magnanimity of his heart?

Gangavataran did prove to be Dadasaheb's last movie. From the purse he received at the silver jubilee, he started cottage industries like preparation of Italian spaghetti, soap manufacture, and production of silver from hypo. He succeeded in these undertakings too. However, his way of working without financial considerations came in his way here also. The expenses exceeded profits and half the amount received by way of the purse was expended in these activities. Madhavrao Shukla of Nashik, whom Dadasaheb loved as his son, paid personal attention to this matter. In order that Dadasaheb should have his own place to live in during his last days, Shukla took a lead in constructing a house for him at Gangapur Road and from the residual amount of the purse, a small bungalow was built in 1942. Dadasaheb himself named it as 'Hind Cine Janakashram' (Hermitage of the Father of Indian Cinema). He went to stay in his own house but its cost of construction had exceeded the estimate and Dadasaheb was burdened with a debt of about two and a half thousand rupees fifty years ago. Debts and financial worries never left him. He tried to make paintings and sell them but that too did not work.

During his stay in Pune, Dadasaheb fell ill. Penniless, he could not help writing to V. Shantaram on 25th August 1939 requesting him to send a sum of five rupees so as to reach him on Dasara day. Shantarambapu was in Prabhat at the time. He immediately sent the money to Dadasaheb. The touching letter is published in *Shantarama*.

I came to know of a similar incident, which I have mentioned in an article I wrote on the occasion of the 50th death anniversary (1990) of Nanasaheb Sarpotdar. Dadasaheb owed Rs 2 to Poona Guest House. Nanasaheb would never have asked for it. In fact, he did not like that Dadasaheb paid for lodging and boarding in his guest house. But he did this much: he charged Dadasaheb only a nominal amount. Dadasaheb pawned a copy of his movie at a Marwadi's shop for Rs 3, paid off Rs 2 to Poona Guest House and kept Re 1 for the train fare to Nashik. In those days, the fare was only that much. Had a generous man like Nanasaheb known this, he would not only have refused to accept the money but, on the other hand, arranged for Dadasaheb's trip to Nashik.

After going to stay in his own house, Dadasaheb contracted diabetes. He was without work. He would sit and write whatever came to his mind. Like the father of cinematography, David Griffith, Dadasaheb made trips from one studio to another with his stories. Towards the end of 1942, he visited Prabhat Studio. V. Shantaram had left Prabhat by that time. Dadasaheb met Vishnupant Damle and showed him some of his stories. Damle bought the story named *Japani Pankha* for which he paid him Rs 2,000 as honorarium. Dadasaheb was very much in need of money at the time.

Raja Nene, assistant director in Prabhat, who later became a director, read the story. He apprised his maternal uncle, Vishnupant Damle, of his opinion: "We shall have to consider whether this story would be useful for a Prabhat movie". Damle replied immediately, "We shall see to it later. We had got to buy one of his stories. I know his circumstances. If I had offered him money for free, this proud man would not have accepted it. That is why I bought the story. Whatever position we have today, Prabhat's affluence, its worldwide fame, our own prosperity, we owe it all to the indigenous industry started by this great man. Consider it as a token repayment of that debt". Raja Nene has narrated this incident in a newspaper article he wrote on the occasion of Damle's 25th death anniversary on 5th July 1970. I saw the file of *Japani Pankha* after joining Prabhat as Chief Assistant Director since the days of 'Ramshastri'.

In 1943, Dadasaheb gave a touching and protracted interview to the cine-weekly *Film News* of Madras. The Second World War was on. The world of cinema, especially Hindi cinema, was starting on an indecorous path. I reproduce below an important portion of Dadasaheb's interview.

> I am very much disappointed about the creations of Indian Film Industry. With what ideals and with what long-drawn-out suffering I built up this indigenous industry and what it is my misfortune to see today! Cinema is a *Kamdhenu* (a cow that grants one's wishes). But now this cow does not get to feed on science, art, morality and patriotism, but wallows in the slush of wining, whoring and wagering. She gets the diet of a plethora of flashy ads. I understand that a number of studios are on the verge of becoming places unworthy of a

> visit by gentlemen. Despite this if the creations of these studios were to be excellent, one would have ignored their seamy side, but while there is no excellence, there is an excess of filth. Although the technique has improved, the length of movies has gone up. Songs, dialogues and vulgar jokes are plentiful. It is totally wrong to squeeze in songs merely for the sake of it.

These candid comments of Dadasaheb, of fifty years ago, are equally applicable today. His main thrust was against the growing, excessive pampering of artistes.

Moving Pictures, the cine-periodical which had praised Dadasaheb abundantly for the revolution wrought by *Lankadahan*, requested him, writing with great modesty, to send for their special issue on him information about himself and the maximum number of photographs. However, for one thing, Dadasaheb's diabetes had worsened and secondly he was overwhelmed by depression and frustration. He informed the editor, "My child has now totally forgotten me. Should I remind her that I am her father? I have no longer the slightest interest in this field of activity or in publicity for myself. No one should now kindly do anything for me. Root out from your mind the idea of bringing out a special issue on me. I have no expectations, enthusiasm or vigour left. Leave me alone. Why try to bring me into limelight? Does anybody have any love, respect or curiosity about me? What is the use of thrusting this issue on the readers? I am thankful to you for remembering me. Excuse me for my inability to co-operate with you in this undertaking. Please do not misunderstand or be offended." This was towards the end of 1943.

To add to it, Dadasaheb suffered from amnesia. He vividly remembered his childhood, his friends of those days. He would converse with some of his dead friends as if they were alive and sitting in front of him. But, unfortunately, he had lost the memory of the days of his active life. He was unable to talk about those days with any consistency. However, this condition improved substantially by medication. As his son-in-law, Mai's husband, was a medical practitioner and lived in Nashik, he took maximum care of Dadasaheb.

One day, Dadasaheb's son, Prabhakar, said to him, "Dada, you have produced animated films like *Fun With Matchsticks*, and *Laxmi's Carpet*. We have a Pathe camera at home. We shall produce cartoon films. I will do all the work. You only be with me".

God knows how, but Dadasaheb again showed a spurt of enthusiasm. His mind egged him on: I should produce a movie for which I should choose such a subject as would hold up to view the real Indian culture. The Indian audience should be told that this is our culture, not what you see in today's movies. This means that although Dadasaheb was depressed, he had not retired. In those days of the Second World War, a government licence was necessary for producing a movie and producers usually got it on application. Dadasaheb too sent an application to Delhi on 26th January 1944 for a licence. There was no reason why any difficulty should have arisen in his getting the licence. He had produced and directed so many movies. He was, after all, the father of Indian Cinema!

Dadasaheb was all eyes, waiting for the licence. He had planned to proceed with his movie immediately on receiving it. But 'Oh, No!' Misfortune dealt him the final and fatal blow. On 14th February he received a letter from Delhi saying, 'It is not possible to grant you a licence'. This unbearable shock completely enervated him. He was drained of energy. Grief-stricken, he said, "Toiling and struggling for twenty-five years, I brought glory to Indian Cinema, neglected my family, contracted illnesses by the stress of financial worries. I am like a calf, which has lost its way. I have again realised that a penniless man is worth nothing".

Dadasaheb suffered hardships all along for the cinema, but had never felt done for, had never lost his guts. Every time he stood up resolutely again and yet again, confronting new difficulties, new challenges. But he could not bear this mortal blow. Only a day later, even before the ink of government's negative reply dried, on 16th February 1944, at the age of 74, the Father of Indian Cinema breathed his last in penury, in great mental agony. A play with dreams was over. A life-long struggle came to an end.

The world of cinema did not take much notice of Dadasaheb's death. Even the cinema theatre near his house was open that day. The newspapers too did not give prominence to the news of his death. Only a few persons attended the last journey of this great man. This extraordinary man who exhibited incomparable bravery in building up the cinema industry and, in the words of Sant Dnyaneshwar 'enclosed a whole universe in his arms', went on his last journey like the most ordinary man. Some great technocrats who did invaluable work for world cinema had a similar end. The father of cinematography, David Griffith, died in 1948 as a pauper in a cheap hotel. The inventor of trick photography George Mellier lived, in his last days, by selling newspapers and died in 1938 in a home for destitute artists. Nearer home, even Dadasaheb's right hand man, successful director Mama Shinde, worked as an ordinary employee in his last days in a match factory at Ambernath. He too died unnoticed.

Along with the qualities of mature intelligence, inventive turn of mind, healthy body, creativity, artistic acumen, capability to achieve the unachievable and capacity to become an expert in whatever field he entered or art he pursued, Dadasaheb was born in the company of misfortune as well. For, his misfortune had not yet ended. After his death, auntie had got her daughter-in-law to write her memoirs chronologically from the day of her marriage with Dadasaheb until his death. She was bed-ridden with paralysis, but an understanding woman that she was from the very beginning, her memory was quite unimpaired.

Three months after Dadasaheb's death, his second daughter Malati was offered in marriage to Shrikrishna, a government officer and son of a retired government officer, Shri Pusalkar. He was not acquainted with Dadasaheb but revered him. When the proposal regarding Malati was made, he was overjoyed and said, "I believe that Dadasaheb himself is coming into our family in the shape of Malati" and this marriage took place. Pusalkar had cut out clippings of whatever was published in the press about Dadasaheb and made a regular file of it. He handed it over to auntie with pleasure. Mai Athavle had seen these clippings. She also read what her sister-in-law had written down as told by auntie. Mai herself told me that these memoirs were very touching. One day, a man named Kulkarni called on auntie. (I do not know whether he was the editor of *Navyug* magazine). He had come to know about the memoirs. He urged auntie, "What are you going to do with all this, keeping it in the house? It's very valuable. It is the history of Indian cinema. It is most useful to readers, students of Indian cinema and researchers. It is of extraordinary importance. I will make an excellent book of it so that it will be permanent as it ought to be". Auntie agreed with it and without much thought handed over the whole material to Kulkarni. It is so long since then but neither is there a book nor the manuscript or clippings returned to their owner. Maybe, it is all gone. An invaluable source of history has thus vanished.

Durga Khote too collected a lot of material about Phalke. She sincerely desired to hand it over to me and even wrote to me about it. However, that material too is not traceable. Due to Durgabai's death the possibility of getting it has also receded. This too is a part of the misfortune. Had all this material been there, a very authentic history of Indian cinema would have been available. But that was not to be.

What did the world of cinema do for Dadasaheb? The street on which stands Mathuradas Bhavan, in Dadar, Mumbai, where Dadasaheb produced the first Indian movie, has been named after him and on the street corner a small bronze bust of Dadasaheb has been installed. That's all! The responsibility is over!!

In 1988, the government of Maharashtra arranged a function to commemorate the completion of 75 years by Indian cinema. It was held at Nashik. The chief guest was Ganpatrao Tambat. Afterwards I met Mandakini (Mai) Athavle. I said to her, "Mai, you are Dadasaheb's daughter, living in Nashik. You should have got the honour of being the chief guest at the function". She replied, "I was not even invited. Leave that alone. There were programmes on the radio and the television about Nashik but there was not even a mention of Dadasaheb. So, who am I in comparison? However, it needs to be specifically mentioned that a B.B.C. team came searching my address. They talked to me very respectfully and filmed an interview with me at the spot where our studio once stood. It showed that the awareness that foreigners have, our own countrymen do not have. I am saying this not because they interviewed me. They had very studiously collected a mass of material about Indian cinema in detail. I really appreciated it. Nashik is so far away from London. I was pleasantly surprised to see they had come all the way searching for me".

Two senior artistes of Prabhat, Ganpatrao Tambat and Haribhau Lonari lived in Nashik. Three years ago, Anantrao Damle and I specially went to Nashik and Anantrao made a gift of money to both. They were felicitated at the hands of Mai Athavle as they both worked in Dadasaheb's company before they joined Prabhat. Mai made a short but emotional speech: "These two senior artistes of our company, who are like brothers to me, are being felicitated at my hands. This is a small, private and homely function, which overwhelms me. I am thankful to Anantrao for doing me this honour. During Dadasaheb's last days Anantrao's father Vishnupant Damle had sent money to him as an honorarium without publicising it. Those memories have crowded my mind".

Although it is true that Dadasaheb was paid scant attention even after his death, the Indian government did acknowledge his work, albeit late in the day. The respect for him was translated into action because of which he will be remembered forever. Dadasaheb's birth centenary came up in 1970. From that year, the government of India introduced a scheme to give 'Phalke Award' every year to an artist or a technician who served the cause of cinema over a long period with distinction. The award is conferred ceremoniously with a purse, the amount of which at present is one lakh rupees. Raj Kapoor got this award during his last days. Although he was not in good enough health to attend the ceremony, he enthusiastically remained present and with great feeling said, "I consider Dadasaheb Phalke Award as the greatest honour. As it has been conferred on me, there now remains nothing else for me to achieve," and he was overwhelmed with emotion.

On the occasion of the birth centenary, a special postage stamp was issued in honour of Dadasaheb. In addition, his colleagues, still living, were honoured, including Mai.

16

THE FAMILY LIFE OF DADASAHEB

It is said that there is a woman behind every successful man. If the truth of this saying is accepted, in the case of Dadasaheb it is beyond description. If a great man is God's fame, a great woman is a Goddess incarnate. Only because Saraswatibai was one such, she steered the family life of a fantastic artist like Dadasaheb to the end, through the constantly recurring calamities, as best she could without complaining or fretting. If he had not had a wife like the pious auntie, one cannot imagine what would have been the condition of not only Dadasaheb but his children as well. Her ability to cope with suffering was peerless. Dadasaheb's first love was art. He never ever worried about his family, never discharged his responsibilities as head of the family. Auntie did everything!

Life was frequently stormy. To add to it, Dadasaheb was hot-headed, stewed in his own juice, whimsical, queer, obstinate, but Saraswatibai tried to keep him in good humour till the end. Never once did she hurt him. Never once complained to him about the household difficulties, even if she had to go hungry.

Dadasaheb had to face caustic criticism constantly due to his obsession with making the film industry indigenous. He was past forty, poverty-stricken, without any support. The leaders of the *Swadeshi* movement had ditched him. His well-wishers and relatives considered him foolish. Some would say so to his face, some others would criticise him, make fun of him, behind his back. Saraswatibai alone would console him. Not only that, whenever she found that Dadasaheb was in financial straits, this devoted wife gave him her jewellery time and again. It became a routine that whenever the going was good, they would buy new jewellery and whenever a bad patch occurred, they would take it to the goldsmith's shop to sell. The attainment of her husband's objective became her self-ordained way of life.

In the beginning, 50-75 persons lived in the bungalow of Dadasaheb's company. Readers can well imagine how gruelling and troublesome a task it was to arrange properly for the feeding of such a crowd twice a day, but auntie did it every day with a smile, without a whimper. She would remember their predilections, their fasts falling on different days of the Hindu calendar, and prepare different dishes for them. She would also quietly arrange for the tobacco and *paan* for the female artistes. For the wrestlers, Dadasaheb had arranged for a daily drink of creamy milk which also auntie had to supervise. If anyone took ill, she would nurse him personally. She attended to all this routinely, and also lovingly arranged for some of them to set up a family. Going beyond that, she held baby-showers for the female artistes and occasionally even arranged for delivering their babies. She was really a goddess incarnate. But while she helped establish the families of others, she could not successfully tend her own, due to Dadasaheb's being totally negligent of his family life. However much he was successful as an artist, as a husband and father in his own family life, he was a failure. It does not mean that he did not have any love for his wife or children, but he was always thinking of and worried about his life as an artist. He was totally immersed in it. He always felt that his children should be well behaved. In order that there should be a good cultural impact on the children, he established a small library for them and subscribed to children's magazines like *Anand* and

Balodyan. Good reading material for children by way of books like *Bal Bhagwat, Ramayan, Mahabharat* were included in the library. He provided them with various toys too. But he never paid attention to the academic education of his intelligent children.

Dadasaheb earned thousands of rupees in the film industry, but due to his impractical policies he lost it all in film production, not in addiction! He could not take advantage of the wealth he got, either for himself or his family. The situation of want never eased. Since he left the Hindusthan Film Company for the first time, he was again unable to provide for the needs of his family. Auntie had, therefore, to trudge along the path of daily living, living in debt even for groceries. There were occasions when the house rent was in arrears, and she could not help but move to the outhouse by the grace of the landlord. Even on such occasions Dadasaheb would engage himself in reading, thinking, contemplation, research, painting, gardening or some such activity.[9]

Because of want of firmness and his queer behaviour Dadasaheb could never settle himself anywhere. As a result, he became more and more irritable and obstinate, which created strife in his family life. After he was past fifty, there was much talk about the relationship of virtuous Dadasaheb and an actress Vithabai. He alone knew whether at Vithabai's house his agitated, restless mind felt at peace. But Saraswatibai, to whom her husband was God, suffered all that; suffered public criticism in silence. Dadasaheb must definitely have had a guilty conscience about it, as he would start an argument on the flimsiest pretext at home. This episode took place when he was in Hindusthan Film Company. He was quarrelsome in the company and now at home as well. On such occasions he would get terribly angry. When he went to the company after having an altercation at home, he would go and sit in the horse-drawn carriage kept at his disposal, without speaking to anybody. The people would then guess that something had gone wrong at home, and they felt more sympathy for Saraswatibai.

Dadasaheb had been abroad thrice. Let alone liquor, he did not even smoke a cigarette. He did not have the slightest addiction. How could a man who had a spotless character until then, have succumbed? Everyone was surprised. It must be considered an accident, which happened when he was in mental imbalance, as the affair came to an end in six months although it created a storm. It shocked everyone into surprise, consternation. Saraswatibai was really so firmly anchored! The wave struck the ship of her married life and it swayed, but she did not let it capsize. The wave came and dissipated. Over time, the affair was consigned to the limbo.

Saraswatibai had many children. The goddess of wealth returned from her threshold so many times without making a dent in the family's continued poverty. Saraswatibai never worried about herself, but the worry about her children, their education, their future, worried her throughout her life. After Dadasaheb's death, she was confined to bed due to paralysis. Gradually, her children found their way in life. Although her life was overcast by worries, she did not lose her sense of humour or her capacity to put up with suffering. She was an ideal wife, ideal mother and a symbol of devotion for many. The loving auntie left this world on 1st June 1953. She was relieved, finally released. Salute to her! Her extraordinary sacrifice, achievements and smartness remained unknown to the world.

Dadasaheb's children

1. **Bhalchandra alias Babaraya** : He was close to the film world. He had achieved expertise in photography, but was short-lived. He has been mentioned earlier.
2. **Mahadeo** : When Dadasaheb was living in Kashi, Mahadeo died there at the age of 12.

3. **Mandakini (Mai) Athavle** : The first child artiste of Indian cinema, doing a main role. She had played the role of Shrikrishna in Dadasaheb's *Kaliamardan* in 1919. Her husband was a pathologist. Until now Mai lived in Nashik. She died in October 1993 at the age of 82 leaving behind a married daughter, a son and a grandchild. I have tape-recorded a two-hour interview with her for the National Film Archives.
4. **Neelkanth** : He worked as an interpreter with the Indo-German Cultural Association; died on 22nd January 1991. Durga Bhagwat, renowned thinker, wrote a special article on him in *Maharashtra Times* after his death. I reproduce here an excerpt from it :

   > A son of Dadasaheb, he was a man who transformed into reality his inner inspiration and that inspiration was his sole resource. He had no other intrinsic support. He had neither the shelter of his home nor the support of learning. He also had weak eyesight, a family trait of the Phalkes. Neelkanth, a non-matric, became a famous linguistic expert. He had the gift of acting too. The English language attracted him. Whenever Englishmen were out to play golf, he would speak with them in English. He would run after golf balls and get them for the players and earn some four annas for the job. This way he established a relationship with the local Englishmen and in two years' time he became the only boy in Nashik to speak fluent English. He was my teacher of German! Along with French and Spanish, he mastered Japanese as well. He spoke Gujarati, Bengali and Hindi with ease. Nilu was thus extraordinary. About 1950, my sister Dr Kamla Sohoni recruited him as a German tutor for the Royal Institute of Science. Thereafter, he joined the Indo-German Society. Neelkanth was thus a man of keen intelligence and quite fast on the uptake.

One or two more articles were published on Neelkanth. In one of them it was stated that 'while in school he mimicked Charlie Chaplin very realistically to the applause of all'. This shows that Neelkanth was a born actor. But he did not get the exposure he deserved and his innate qualities did not prove useful in his father's field of activity. Dadasaheb had either no use of those qualities or he could not put them to use.

5. **Prabhakar** : He worked in the State Transport. After retirement, he now lives in the 'Hind Cine-Janakashram' at Nashik.
6. **Shrikrishna**: Died in childhood.
7. **Devdatta** : A lover of music. Played the flute. Sang in choruses in movies. He too died five years ago.
8. **Mrs Malati Pusalkar** : Lives in Mulund. Husband Shrikrishna retired from the Home Department of Sachivalaya. Given to a spiritual way of life. (The Pusalkars presently live at Mahim in suburban Mumbai. Shri Pusalkar retired from the Education Department of Mantralaya and not Home—*Translator.*)
9. **Suresh**: He was a storekeeper in the Dining Department of the Railways. Did small roles in Atre Theatre's and other plays and movies. Also did a role in the famous play *To Me Navhech.* Now he too is no more.

This is a short introduction to the members of Dadasaheb's family.

17

DOWN MEMORY LANE WITH DADASAHEB'S FAMILY AND CLOSE ASSOCIATES

Bhalchandra alias Babaraya Phalke

As Prabhat Film Company bought Dadasaheb's story *Japani Pankha*, we could make a copy of *Setubandhan*. It had a satisfactory audience response, which helped improve our financial circumstances.

During the Second World War, a licence was essential for producing a movie. After Dadasaheb applied to the government at New Delhi, I met V. Shantaram, as he was the president of IMPPA (Indian Motion Pictures Producers' Association). He told me, however, that he could not do anything as the government implemented the rules very strictly. Hearing this, I was more sorry than disappointed, because merchants of paper, asafoetida, iron and even *shev-gathya,* who had nothing at all to do with the film industry were becoming producers of films, passing the government's strict tests. I wanted to get our application approved through an institution like the IMPPA. It was obvious that we had the first claim. As, however, IMPPA did nothing, we sent the application direct but it was rejected by the government in clear terms. That too only two days before Dadasaheb's death. Earlier, on Dadasaheb's return from a tour of Iran, he had received enough publicity, but it was of no avail.

Mandakini Athavle (Mai)

I did roles in Dadasaheb's two films, *Krishna Janma* and *Kaliamardan*. In *Kaliamardan*, he gave me the central role of Krishna. I was only six or seven years old, yet Dadasaheb said that only my maternal uncle should do my make-up, no one else. He did not like it if I mixed too much with the boys. He lovingly called me Sonu.

Dadasaheb got a short film made showing him, mother and us (children) sauntering in a park. Before actually acting in films, he taught me how to show emotions like anger, love, fear, joy etc. and made me do it accordingly. He would do it himself for me to see. At the time of actual shooting, he would do the acting and I would imitate him. When he said, 'Go on,' the camera would start and I would act out the scene. When he said, 'Stop', the camera and my acting would stop. However, I was not allowed to enter the studio at other times. After I got married at the age of fourteen, my association with the studio became less and less, even though I lived in Nashik!

Dada was a terror in the house. If any child made a mistake, he would immediately make him hold his big toes. Worse still, after the child bent over, he would place a utensil full of water on his back. It must not shake a bit. If it did, more severe punishment would follow. This would give an idea of his nature.

He also petted me, appreciated me quite a lot. But if he got angry, he could not control himself. One day, I was acting out in front of his shaving mirror the emotions he had taught me himself. As he entered the room, he saw me, lost his temper and severely slapped me in the face. "What are you making faces for before the mirror?" he roared and warned, "Look into the mirror only at the time of make-up, you understand? If I see you again before a mirror, I will give you a good hiding".

Prabhakar Phalke

Before forming the Hindusthan Film Company, Dadasaheb went from one town to another taking with him seven or eight persons, a projector and the films *Raja Harischandra*, *Mohini-Bhasmasur*, and *Satyavan Savitri*. When he was once in Gwalior, Balasaheb Pant Pratinidhi was camping there. In *Raja Harishchandra*, there is a scene in which Taramati arrives in a palanquin and after the palanquin is placed on the ground, the bearers go away crossing the pole of the palanquin. Pant Pratinidhi advised in this regard, 'One must not cross the pole like this. One must go round it'.

Dada's cameraman worked also as a sweeper and a cook. Everyone could do any job. When *Lankadahan* was under production, Dada had only nine persons with him. The boys from the gymnasium would be happy when they got *jalebis* to eat after the day's shooting. Many persons who trained under Dada became adept in many things. He created a long line of student-followers, as it were. A student of Dada could easily get a job in other film companies. Illiterate Anna Salunke who was trained for Taramati's role, could later handle a Bell and Howell camera. Dattopant Dabke, who did the role of Harishchandra, later made a name as Jagdish Film Company's cameraman. Nashik, which was famous as a place of priests and pilgrimage, became an important centre of film production after Dada moved in there. The priests of Nashik were moneyed men who formed Godavari Cinetone at Nashik in 1935. The great poet Kusumagraj wrote the story of their film *Sulochana*. Not only that, he also played the role of Laxman in it. The material prepared by Dada for Hindusthan Film Company proved useful to them. (However, this film was not completed.)

Dada gave the utmost importance to photography. He never liked the photography of other Indian films. However, he liked the photography of Baburao Painter's *Sinhgad* so much that he would urge others to see it. He showed the foreign film *Velvet Finger* to his colleagues again and again for its photography and explained to them its high points.

Although Dada's partners and colleagues were good men, he never could carry on with any of them. On falling foul of his partners, he went to Kashi. About a year or six months before that, he stayed at home. After his contract for fifteen years with Hindusthan Film Company expired, he started production of a silent movie, *Setubandhan*. At that time a talkie, *Love Parade*, was on at The Empress. Even with the knowledge that Marathi talkies would soon make their appearance, production of *Setubandhan* was proceeding at snail's pace. When Dada left Hindusthan Film Company, they gave him a sum of fifteen thousand rupees as a token of gratitude, for the reason that his films brought money to the company.

After achieving fame in the field of cinema, Dada must have thought that he should do something in the field of drama, that he could do something outstanding in that field too. Realising that the technique of writing a play was different, that it is a literary form, he invited N.H. Apte. However, he did not approve of Apte's writing. The hero of the play, Sangeetrao, was Dada himself. The heroine was Madhuri. The others gang up against him and he becomes unpopular. They make it difficult for him to make a living. However, his fortune takes a turn for the better and then everyone makes up with him with folded hands. This was, in short, the plot of the *Rangbhoomi* play. The central idea of the play was good. Apte had written a good script, but Dada spoiled it, while doing the role of Sangeetrao, by straying off the subject, and by being repetitive. He did not agree that much of the text was irrelevant.

The following recollection pertains to the year 1943 after Dada suffered from amnesia. He found a handkerchief in the house. As it was worn out, I wanted to throw it away. He said, 'This frayed kerchief is good for cleaning lenses'.

He would ask mother at any time whether the meal was ready. After his amnesia improved, I once held before him a page of the *Illustrated Weekly of India.* There was a photograph on it of two tribals. He loudly read its title, 'Naga Warriors of Assam'.

In August 1914, Dada went to Europe by an Australian ship. As the First World War was on and as it was not a warship, the British captured it. Two cannon balls had hit the ship. A white flag was flown. All the passengers were off-loaded at Alexandria, which was nearby. Dada remained there for two months. He provided for his daily needs by doing paintings. After a few days he sent a telegram home and when Babarai sent him money, he continued his journey onward.

After Dada left Hindusthan Film Company, other companies invited him, but the notoriety of his peculiar behaviour had spread in the film industry. As a result, he lost the opportunity of being the director of *Sant Tulsidas* of Ranjit Movietone, which slot was earmarked for him. Vishnupant Pagnis, who did the role of Tulsidas, suggested to Chandulal Shah Baburao Painter's name. Pagnis himself told Dada about it. It is a different matter that ultimately the movie was directed by Jayant Desai.

Suresh Phalke

This is a recollection of my childhood. It was Dasara day. Dada had taken me to the *muhurat* of a movie. He had dressed in western style that day. I saw him in ~~such a dress~~ only once. Seeing the respect with which he was treated at the function, I realised that my father was a very big personality. Because of him, I became knowledgeable about camera, negative, positive, and different shots. He would often take me to the studio. Scraps of film were my playthings. Dada went to the studio in the morning and returned about two o'clock at night. If he returned early, there would be a light in his room. Covering his head with a headscarf and keeping a pillow on his knees, he would write something. Sometimes he would read too. If he were doing neither, he would be thinking, pacing up and down the room with his hands at the back. We avoided his room, being afraid of him although curious too. If he were in a good mood, he would caress and pet us, but such occasions were few and far between.

In Dada's room framed paintings of Ravi Verma, Baburao Painter, and Dhurandhar were hung on the walls. Flowerpots with variegated flowers adorned his table. Artistic statues stood at different places. His room easily gave an idea of his eye for artistic beauty. A newspaper of Madras had said, "Lessons in decoration should be learned from Dadasaheb Phalke". He loved gardening very much. He had an innate understanding of it. Saplings planted by him would grow well and bear flowers. His garden was beautiful. He would tend to various things in the house whenever he had time. The furniture in the house would be a district collector's envy. It also showed his artistic bent of mind.

The family expanded from time to time. It comprised a dozen souls. In addition, three or four guests made our house their home for years together. There were about four servants, besides occasional guests staying for short periods. Consequently, the household expenses were huge. There was military discipline and neatness in the house. Dada had provided every thing; there was only want of love. Mother made up for it. He must have been under mental pressure due to unmitigated labour and financial worries, which is perhaps why he did not express his love or pay attention to household matters. As a result, we could be aware of only his extraordinary intelligence, artistic acumen and creativity.

Dada claimed that he created god out of stone. Exaggeration apart, the artistes and technicians who trained under him achieved such a level of proficiency that they would never be in difficulty of making a living. Dada's teaching skills were unprecedented.

Dr Vishvanathrao Athavle

In 1924 I happened to marry Dadasaheb's eldest daughter Mandakini. He had a car at the time. Although I dressed in western style, Dadasaheb insisted that his son-in-law must arrive for the wedding on horseback and I complied with his wishes. Everyone knew that he was hot-headed, but he was loving too. When I first went to him after becoming a doctor, he had a swelling behind one of his ears. Other doctors were of the opinion that it was a tumour that needed surgery. Dadasaheb said, "My son-in-law is a doctor. His name is Vishvanath (Lord of the universe). Triambakeshwar's name is also Vishvanath. I want him to treat me". Surprisingly, the swelling disappeared by a simple ointment like Iodex.

Dadasaheb was quite negligent about his family life. He was in pursuit of an ideal like an ascetic, because of which he did not know what was going on in the house. His achievements in the field of cinema are well known, but one more aspect of his artistic nature was that he made excellent enamel plates. He had once been awarded a prize at the hands of Vishweswarayya in an industrial exhibition. He had made a name-plate for me, which was fixed on the door of our house in Nashik. He had at that time received orders from the Western and Central Railways for making name-plates for railway stations. Buying tin sheets, he had worked on them too. He had also made name-plates for the roads in Nashik. Although Dadasaheb was queer and impractical, I always felt respect for him.

Narayan Hari Apte

Dadasaheb Phalke stayed with me for some days at my village Koregaon. He had come for rest and relaxation due to the discord with his partners in the cinema industry. As he was senior to me in age, I would talk with him discreetly. Due to his being hot-headed, nobody tried to advise him. However, as I associated with him as a writer, I would tell him what I thought in connection with writing.

I wrote for him the play *Rangbhoomi*, as also the script for the movie *Gangavataran*. This brought us closer. But I must say that so far as *Rangbhoomi* was concerned, we could not see eye to eye. For writing *Rangbhoomi*, I stayed with Dadasaheb for a year at Durgaghat in Banaras. After having really done excellent work in the field of silent movies, he intended to make some concrete contribution to the Marathi stage. However, due to some special conditions he had in his mind, his ambition was not fulfilled. His main intention was to show that when a capitalist dominates an artist, art is destroyed. This premise is good from the point of view of creating situations in the play, but when putting them into words, Dadasaheb had no sense of proportion as to how much the villain should be maligned. My stand was that there should be no objection to depicting the good qualities of the villain too. However, as he always felt that he had to suffer a lot of injustice, he made the villain of the play the target of all sorts of unfounded charges. One would say that his own nature deserved the blame for this.

Because of these excesses, the play stretched on to about 12 acts and was very diffused. Nobody could have liked this long-winded play. However, the obstinate Dadasaheb cut the play in two parts. He often remarked that just as people came to see his silent movies, they would throng the theatre to see his plays. I placed before him Deval's play *Sharda* and said that we should write our play on the lines of that play. He did not agree. Others supported him. He was prompted to write this play because of the alleged misbehaviour of his partners in the cinema business. But, truly, we did not think they did anything wrong.

His achievements went to Dadasaheb's head. As he went from one success to another, his studiousness diminished. Before writing *Rangbhoomi*, we called for George Bernard Shaw's plays. He did not, however, read them. I had complete faith in his abilities, but there was no remedy for his nature. Not that he was not conciliatory at all, sometimes he was, but then without rhyme or reason he would get queer. Because he was so renowned in his field, we had great respect for him. He lived in a world of his own creation so that he rubbished everything else. He liked Baburao Painter's movies, but he did not treat him as an artist.

Up to the time of *Lankadahan*, Dadasaheb would have new ideas, but later he changed a great deal. A feeling got hold of him that whatever he said or did was correct, that nobody could hold a candle to him. We got books on stage direction, but they remained untouched. His eccentricity, idiosyncrasy, was on the rise. There are instances to bear that out. Baburao Painter and Dadasaheb were both great artists, both pioneers. I worked as a writer with both of them. Baburao was lazy, but calm. Dadasaheb was industrious, but peppery. What a contrast in the disposition of two born artists!

Gangadharpant alias Bapusaheb Pathak

(Owner, Aryan Cinema, Pune)

Our theatre started on 7th February 1915, but *Raja Harishchandra* was the first Indian movie screened in it on 28th May 1915. Dadasaheb Phalke and I became friends since then. His subsequent movies too were screened in our theatre. Dadasaheb first screened his most popular movie *Lankadahan* of 1917 in our theatre.

For his next movie *Shrikrishna Janma*, Dadasaheb did not have the necessary capital. He had vowed to produce this movie at all costs. Once he said to me in disgust, "If I were born in England or Germany, my qualities would have been appreciated. A gifted man like me would have been given a leg up to ascend the ladder of success". I was aware of Dadasaheb's tremendous creativity. Being well acquainted with industrialist Walchand Hirachand, I took Dadasaheb to him and said, "The art of cinema is quite new to our country. You should help to develop it. Phalke needs encouragement from people like you". Nothing resulted from that meeting. Phalke returned to Nashik.

One day Walchandsethji came to me and expressed his desire to meet Phalke. So, we went to Nashik and I took him to Dadasaheb, who said indiscreetly, "Your Walchandsheth is a capitalist. Capitalists do not know about business. They only know how to impose their conditions for lending money". To soften the blow, I said, "This is not Phalke speaking, it is his circumstances that are speaking". Walchandsethji asked Phalke, "How much money do you want? If you agree to my terms, let us go to the solicitor right now".

Sethji prepared a draft. It contained a condition that the movie should be completed in three or four months' time. Dadasaheb was to get Rs 200 per month. Dadasaheb shot back, "That's all right, but I am an artist. I cannot guarantee that the movie will be completed in a specified period". I said to Sethji, "Dadasaheb is a man of determination. He is proud. He does not, therefore, agree to your condition regarding a time limit". The Sethji replied, "These whimsical persons are always like that. If tomorrow Phalke loses his temper and leaves, what will I do with these reels of film? The expenditure on staff would have to be met. If you invest money, all this follows". In this way, the negotiations fizzled out.

Later, with my mediation, Hindusthan Film Company was formed. In my theatre, the movie *Shielding Shadow* was on at the time. I showed it to Dadasaheb on purpose. He got the idea of *Kaliamardan* from it. I arranged for capital for the movie too. However, Dadasaheb's differences with the partners went to the extreme and he left Hindusthan Film Company. I had complete faith in Dadasaheb's capability; what I did not trust was his queer nature. I called on Wamanrao Apte. He said, "Dadasaheb is an intelligent man, but I will not go and invite him". I thought that the two should come together. I said to Dadasaheb, "I am the mediator. You better rejoin Hindusthan Film Company". Surprisingly, Dadasaheb replied, "When did I say no?" A settlement was reached on the terrace of my house. I was happy.

I will give you an instance of Dadasaheb's unnecessary, mindless expenditure. For the movie *Setubandhan*, he wanted a particular type of *Vad* tree. The whole staff accompanied him for searching out the tree. The expenditure on conveyance, lodging and miscellaneous items amounted to five thousand rupees in those days. This was an improper, impractical, and extravagant expenditure for something that would be seen for a moment on the screen. But Dadasaheb was not one to listen.

After *Gangavataran*, Dadasaheb had no work. He came to me with the whole family. He had set his mind on forming a new film company. However, my own situation was not good enough to help him. I was extremely sad to see the abject condition of the father of film industry. It pained me that I was unable to help him.

Sahadevrao Tapkire (Make-up man)
This pertains to the time of *Kaliamardan*. Hindusthan Film Company had put out an advertisement in newspapers: 'Wanted children for roles in movies'. In those days, working on stage and in movies was frowned upon. However, my father was modern in outlook. He had a good knowledge of medicine. Besides, we lived in Nashik. He took my elder brother and me to Dadasaheb's house. I was eight years old. My brother was my senior by three years.

My father said to Dadasaheb, "I don't expect any salary for them, but please arrange for their education". He not only agreed to that, but also paid us a salary of Rs 10 per month. He kept me in his own house. To begin with, he gave me the role of one of Krishna's playmates in *Kaliamardan*. His daughter Sonutai (Mandakini) did the role of Krishna. I called her 'Tai'. In the same movie, I had to do the role of a girl in one episode.

Dada was furiousness incarnate. His children never strayed near him. Only Sonutai and I could be near about. Sometimes he would lovingly tell us stories too. He would never tolerate lies. A liar would have no mercy at all. Dadasaheb would give him the severest punishment. Because of this, his children had decided that they would rather not tell a lie, no matter the beating.

Everyone had to work in every department. I had developed an interest in make-up. However, after about a year, Dadasaheb's relations with the partners were askew and he went to Kashi. Some of us, therefore, left Hindusthan Film Company. For a year I stayed at home. Later, I started acting in plays. When Dadasaheb rejoined the company after about a year and a half, those who had left were also taken back in the company.

I started doing my own make-up, copying Ravi Verma's paintings, as I had got to act in each movie. Gradually, I started doing the make-up of others too. Once Dadasaheb came to the make-up department and saw it. Finding that I spent more time in make-up department and did not go to the other departments, he sentenced me to work in the make-up department only. For me, the punishment was a boon and I started concentrating on make-up.

My inborn artistic talent did not escape Dadasaheb's notice. He began to encourage me. A master of the art of make-up, he suggested improvements in my work which increased my enthusiasm and self-confidence. Even then my doing different roles in movies continued, along with the work of make-up. When he came to know that I did make-up by copying Ravi Verma's paintings and had compiled a collection of such paintings, he said that I had done the right thing and gave me some paintings from his own collection. They were very useful to me. My make-up work began to be appreciated in the company.

I was with Dadasaheb up to *Gangavataran*. Thereafter I began working with other companies as a make-up man. My fame reached Madras and a famous company like Gemini invited me and selected me. Later on I became their chief make-up man. There were twelve persons working under me. Such was my lifestyle that I lived in a bungalow and had a car at my disposal. I worked with them until 1972. The fame and prosperity that I achieved was all due to Dadasaheb's blessings. I will never be able to forget his debt. Truly speaking, I realised when I grew up that I did not have the physiognomy for becoming an actor and so I decided to become a make-up man. Dadasaheb not only made me an expert in this art, but my cultural development in his home was also useful to me throughout my life. Even today, I become very emotional when I think of him.

Vasant Shinde (Senior artist)

My family circumstances were very trying. My father died during my childhood. Mother somehow brought up my siblings and myself by working as a labourer. It was not possible to get education. Dadasaheb Phalke's Hindusthan Film Company was in Nashik where we lived. My cousin Prabhakar Chavan was Dadasaheb's assistant photographer. Through his assistance I got a job in his cinema company as a factotum on Rs 5 per month. This was in May 1924. I was 12 then.

In accordance with the tradition of the company, I had to work in every department. However, after Dadasaheb noticed that I was good at drawing, I had to work mainly under the art director Vishwanathrao Palnitkar. When there would be no work there, I worked in other departments. I had a strong physique since childhood. Added to that, daily exercise was a rule of the company. Dadasaheb had appointed a physical instructor for that purpose. The company provided milk as well. As a result, I was physically well-built. I reaped the benefit of it by getting the important role of Ganpati in the movie *Chaturthicha Chandra* which was screened in 1925. I acted in 19 of Dadasaheb's silent movies, in both major and minor roles. I have not forgotten some of the incidents even today.

The year before *Chaturthicha Chandra*, in 1924, I joined duty. The same year I was given the role of Maruti in *Seeta Vanvas*. My act was confined to one scene. To ascertain whether Sita and Lav-Kush were safe, Hanuman (Maruti) surveys the surroundings from a tree. Lav-Kush, seeing a huge monkey on the tree and not knowing Hanuman, approach the tree with bow and arrow and Maruti jumps down the tree. That was the scene to be shot. I was afraid to jump from such a great height, but there was no option. The memory of the earlier movie *Ram-Ravan Yuddha* was afresh.

In *Ram-Ravan Yuddha*, a scene was to be shot in which some giants gather below a tree and the monkeys sitting on the tree jump on them. The shot started but two of the monkeys did not jump due to fear. Dadasaheb did not go for a retake of the scene, but suspended the remiss monkeys on the spot and keeping them on the tree, the whole unit returned to the studio. The two monkeys managed to climb down somehow but had to return to the studio walking about eight miles with the make-up of monkeys on them. On the way, a crowd started following them. As they entered Nashik city, the crowd increased and, making fun of them, followed them up to the studio. The monkeys apologised and Dadasaheb restored their jobs to them. This too was a part of his nature.

In order to avoid such a fate, I was willing to jump. I jumped as the shot started but, unfortunately, my tail was caught up in a branch of the tree and a tail-less Maruti descended. There was laughter all round, but another shot had to be taken. Praying to God, I jumped. This time the shot was okayed and I felt relieved. Whenever there was outdoor shooting, if it was only two or three miles away, everyone had to go walking carrying his make-up material, and that too before sunrise. One had to be ready complete with make-up. Only Dadasaheb, the cameraman and the camera came by car.

For the outdoor shooting of *Syamantak Mani,* it was decided to start at 5 A.M. Accordingly, we all started. As Dadasaheb was to come by car, he was going to start exactly at 6 A.M. However, the driver was about ten minutes late. Dadasaheb lost his temper and he started on foot as soon as it was 6 o'clock. By the time he walked some distance, the driver followed hurriedly in the car, but Dadasaheb would not sit in the car, no matter how much he pleaded repeatedly. It was a scene with Dadasaheb walking and the car following him. He walked five miles up to the shooting spot, but did not sit in the car.

The shooting of the movie *Shatmukhi Ravan* was to be done on the hill at Triambakeshwar. A big, old-fashioned house at the foot of the hill was hired for all to stay in. Gangaram Nhavi, who later did the role of Bhakta Prahlad, and I had no role in the scenes to be shot there. Our jobs were to clean the big house, to send the food to the place of shooting when it was ready, and to prepare the beds of all the persons in the evening. In the spare time, I played marbles, etc. In one bed Gangaram found a tin. He opened it, smelled it and put some powder in his mouth. I asked for a little and he gave me a pinch of it. As I relished the taste, I insisted on more although he was unwilling to give it.

A while later, the effect of the powder began to show. I threw up but after taking buttermilk and lemon juice, the whirling sensation diminished and I was fast asleep. In the evening, the whole team returned from shooting. God knows how, but the incident reached Dadasaheb's ears and he sent for me. He angrily asked me about what happened in the afternoon. I was dumbfounded. Slapping me in the face forcefully, which removed my remaining grogginess, he reprimanded me, "Instead of indulging in such flings, pay more attention to your role. You have inborn acting talent. If you behave well, you will achieve fame as an actor". I behaved as admonished by Dadasaheb, which helped me a lot in my later life. His blessings materialised.

Dadasaheb was never found idling away his time. He was always occupied with something or the other and would not be mindful of even his family. He would be in the studio until late at night. When there would be no other work, he would take a hoe and start weeding the grounds around the studio. After he left Hindusthan Film Company, I too left and took to acting in plays. I learned from him the virtues of unremitting work, keeping one's word, punctuality and discipline. It was he who taught me acting initially. He would show me how to do it. I was lucky that I got Dadasaheb Phalke, father of cinema, as my first teacher.

Baburao Patil

Neelkanth Phalke and I were in the same class in the first and second standards. We were close friends. Often, I took my meals at the Phalkes' home. For taking meals, there were three wooden seats: for sitting, for back support and the third under the plate. There was silverware and dishes made from the choicest groceries. Auntie was a great cook who would lovingly urge me to eat more and still more. Some others would also be there always for meals. Regular exercise and swimming made my physique very fine without any flab. Dadasaheb, therefore, included me as one of Krishna's playmates in *Kaliamardan*. He would send for me later too whenever necessary, and I too acted for fun in his movies whenever he asked me.

Godavari Cinetone was formed at Nashik and they decided to produce the movie *Sulochana*. Due to my physiognomy, physique and the fact that I had done small roles in Dadasaheb's movies, I was selected for the role of Shri Ram. V.V. Shirwadkar alias Kavi Kusumagraj did the role of Laxman. I had done a small role in Dadasaheb's *Setubandhan* too. Dadasaheb lived in Hardikar's bungalow opposite the present State Transport Central station. As ill luck would have it, Dadasaheb's splendour gradually disappeared, which made me very sad. His son Suresh was an instrumentalist. He acted in plays and sold scented sticks as a side business. Whenever he came to me, I purchased a couple of dozen bundles from him. I witnessed Dadasaheb's prosperity and adversity at close quarters. I can never forget it.

Raghunathrao Bhadane

We had a haircutting saloon. Dadasaheb Phalke would visit our saloon for a hair cut. Everyone in Nashik knew him and respected him. I did small roles in amateur theatre groups and asked Dadasaheb, rather nervously, about acting in movies. He asked me to come from the next day and also obtained my father's permission. To begin with, I had to do a female role. I wore a saree, which looked shaggy. Then Dadasaheb donned it himself to show me how to wear it. The first day, he himself dressed me in a saree. I learned film editing under him. Although I did only minor roles in his company, I got somewhat good roles in some movies in Mumbai and Hyderabad. Later, as the acting profession was unpredictable and as I had sufficiently ridden my hobby-horse, I returned to my hereditary profession.

Haribhau Lonari (Actor)
Soon after I started working with Phalke, I got a big break. Due to my hefty and muscular physique he gave me the role of Maruti in *Lankadahan*. Much of the shooting was done at the beach at Ratnagiri. Shooting was done for a scene in which monkeys drop stones in the sea and they float. A bridge is thus formed and the army of monkeys walks over it. It was all trick photography. At the time of shooting we had no idea of it. When, however, we saw it on the screen, we could not understand how he achieved the effect. He also showed us how Maruti should act. This was the only important role I did for him. After this movie was completed, Ganpatrao Tambat and I decided to try for a job in Prabhat Film Company, which was going strong. When we told Dadasaheb about it, he said at once, "I will be glad if you get an entry in a company like Prabhat. They have achieved great fame". He gave us a letter of recommendation too.

With Dadasaheb's blessings we came to Pune and called on V. Shantaram. We showed him Dadasaheb's letter of recommendation. He had written in it, "Good character, good actors". Seeing this recommendation, Shantarambapu immediately recruited us without much deliberation. I had to return to Nashik after four years due to my family problems. In Shantarambapu's *Dharmatma*, I got a good enough role. I had an important role of Kansa's brother Keshi, in Damle-Fatehlal's *Gopalkrishna*. Ganpatrao Tambat remained with Prabhat till the end, with the result that he got important roles in other companies too.

Narayan Madhavji Tambat
I was interested in stage and cinema. I too was a schoolfriend of Neelkanth Phalke. Through him I landed a job as assistant storekeeper in Hindusthan Film Company. My father threw me out of the house because I joined a cinema company. In addition to my work as assistant storekeeper,

I had to act in movies too. Generally, I did minor female roles. Later, I had willy-nilly to leave the company. I had taken part in the national movement. The fact that I was in Dadasaheb Phalke's company for some time and that I got to see his way of working at close quarters was itself a source of joy.

(Of the above interviews the first seven have been previously published. I interviewed the remaining persons.)

18

PHALKE'S TESTIMONY BEFORE C.E. COMMITTEE

In 1927-28, the British government appointed an Indian Cinematograph Enquiry Committee under the chairmanship of Dewan Bahadur T. Rangachariar. An important testimony before that committee was that of Dadasaheb Phalke, given on 13th February 1928. From Phalke's answers to the questions put to him by the committee, an idea can be had of the various aspects of the cinema industry, the difficulties then faced by it and the problems that may arise in future. Phalke's recommendations give an idea of his foresight too.

Q : I think you started the cinema industry in this country.
A : Yes, sir! I started actual production of movies in 1912.

Q : What was the name of your company, which started the industry?
A : The company's name was simply 'Phalke Films'.

Q : For how many years did you work for the company?
A : I worked for the company for nearly six years. Thereafter I founded the Hindusthan Film Company.

Q : How many movies did you produce?
A : So far, nearly 20. Those worthy of a special mention among them are *Lankadahan*, *Shrikrishnajanma*, *Kaliamardan*.

Q : What, according to you, are the shortcomings of movie production?
A : In most of the movies produced in India there is a lack

of technique and artistry. Acting is not good and photography is very poor. Nobody knows anything about the art of photography.

Q : Is that the position even today?

A : Almost the same. Not that there is no improvement at all, a little improvement is perceptible. However, the people who invest money in this business do not even know which camera to buy. They do not also make an attempt to know it.

Q : Is that the main problem?

A : Yes, sir!

Q : What do you suggest for improving the situation?

A : An educational institution should be started in India providing facilities to teach the subjects of photography, acting, script writing, and scenario writing.

Q : Will one such institution be enough for the whole of India?

A : I cannot say for certain. However, there should be some restrictions on film production in this country.

Q : Could such an institution be self-sufficient?

A : I think so. However, it is bound to need government help.

Q : When you started the cinema industry in this country, what difficulties did you meet with?

A : I had to do all things myself. Teaching acting, scenario writing, shooting, and even screening the movie. Whoever in India knew anything about the cinema industry until 1911?

Q : Did you live in Pune?

A : No. I carried on my vocation at Nashik. Although I started it in Mumbai, later I considered Nashik a better place for it.

Q : Did your company have enough capital?

A : No. I started the business by self-sacrifice.

Q : Is Hindusthan Film Company financially sound now?

A : Yes, it is so now.

Q : How many movies does this company produce in a year?

A : About 12 to 14. I think in order to produce a satisfactory movie, three to four months' time should be allowed. However, these days nobody pays any attention to the quality of movies. Instead of the quality, the producers go for quantity. If the quality is thus neglected, I do not think the industry will see better days.

Q : Do you think that despite the shortcomings, Indian movies are popular?

A : Certainly. But, frankly, I think we ought to give better movies.

Q : Suppose the government builds its own studio, will it be useful?

A : I have not thought about it.

Q : Are there any private institutions to which the government can entrust the production of educational films?

A : Yes. That can be done. Initially at least educational films rake in good money.

Q : Do you have any suggestions in this context?

A : Indian film producers face one very tough problem. Mr Maadan of Calcutta has the monopoly of one-third or at least one-fourth of the cinema theatres in India and Burma (Myanmar). In Mumbai too there is one such institution, which is considering the same strategy. To add to it, foreign films monopolise four to eight big theatres. In this situation, producers are very handicapped.

Q : Have you ever tried to get Maadan to screen your films?

A : He is a film producer himself.

Q : That is natural. You can't complain about it.

A : We have not tried as you suggest.

Q : Is it your experience that these people create road-blocks in the way of your company?

A : Not deliberately, but sometimes they cannot help it and we are handicapped.

Q : Do you think that the number of cinema theatres in India should be increased?

A : There is a lot of scope for an increase in the number of cinema theatres. It is important, however, that the quality of the movies should be good too.

Q : That depends on the producers, isn't it?

A : That is so, but movies are very much in demand. It is true that movies have mesmerised the audiences.

Q : What do you think should be done for building more cinema theatres?

A : I have not thought about that aspect.

Q : Do you think that movies have an adverse effect on the audiences?

A : No, I don't think so. Even so, romantic films should not be shown in such large numbers.

Q : But you just now said that films do not have an undesirable effect on the audience.

A : Yes, I did say that. They don't have much undesirable effect.

Q : Even so do you think that love scenes should be kept to the minimum?

A : Yes. There are some traditions, some etiquette. As I had been abroad, I know the traditions in those countries. But we must think of the general audience.

Q : On the one hand you say that the Indian movies are very popular. On the other, you say that the technique, artistry and photography of Indian films are of a very low order. Do you think that even if this continues, the popularity of Indian movies will endure?

A : Even if I do not think so, their popularity will endure.

Q : Even if the present situation continues ... ?

A : The popularity of movies will diminish some time or the other.

Q : Those who see movies often will be bored by such movies later?

A : Certainly. After some time it is bound to happen.

Q : How much do you spend roughly at present on one movie?

A : About ten thousand.

Q : You must be getting back a bigger amount?

A : Yes.

Q : How much time is required for you to recover your expenditure? About six months?

A : Yes, about six months.

Q : What you get thereafter is net profit?

A : Yes.

Q : If you want to improve the quality of movies, you will have to spend more, isn't it?

A : Yes. Although the producers spend any amount of money at present, they are quite unconcerned about the quality of the movies.

Q : Do you mean to say that they do not know how to spend money for more profit?

A : That's true.

Q : Suppose they spend half a lakh on producing a movie, will they recover their money in six months?

A : Mostly no. They will have to wait for at least a year to recover their investment.

Q : Can you say how many cinema theatres there are in India?

A : About 350.

Q : Do you think that if the quality of Indian movies improves, there will be a demand for them from foreign countries? If an excellent movie is made, will it impress the audience in England?

A : It would be wrong to have that expectation from the movies that are produced in India at present. However, if an excellent movie is made, the audiences in foreign countries will definitely like it. I exhibited my movies *Raja Harishchandra, Mohini Bhasmasur*, and *Satyavan Savitri* in London. The newspapers there commented, 'Phalke's movies are technically excellent'.

Q : If that was so, why did you not try to capture the market there?

A : I did not have enough capital. My movies had, in fact, a great demand. They had asked for 25 to 30 copies. Thereafter I founded the HIndusthan Film Company.

Q : Do you think that if you are given the required capital, you can produce in India movies, which can capture the world market?

A : Yes, I think so.

Q : If you take a loan at a high rate of interest, it will not be beneficial to you?

A : Even then I think it would be profitable.

Q : If Indian and English producers produce movies in collaboration and screen them in India and England?

A : A good idea.

Q : Can it materialise?

A : No reason why it shouldn't.

Q : Who distributed your films?

A : Myself.

Q : Did you send your men all over India to screen your movies?

A : Initially I did it myself. Now distributors come to me.

Q : Doesn't your company have any branches elsewhere?
A : Yes, we have. Our main office is in Mumbai, but we have branches at Madras and Calcutta.

Q : We think you have no representatives at other places.
A : We do have at some places.

Q : You said you send your movies to Singapore. Did they do well there?
A : Yes, they did very well. I had sent my movies to Singapore and Rangoon.

Q : Did you ever send your movies to East Africa?
A : Yes, I sent them to Zanjibar.

Q : You said, 'Later I founded the Hindusthan Film Company'. Is it a limited company?
A : It's a partnership business.

Q : What is its capital?
A : Three lakhs.

Q : To produce excellent movies, how much capital would such a company need?
A : Shouldn't require more than three lakhs.

Q : Would that much capital be enough for producing movies for international markets?
A : No, that would need five lakhs.

Q : Is your outfit of artistes at Nashik in permanent employ?
A : Yes, my artistes are permanent employees.

Q : What is the strength of your staff?
A : About a hundred. If you want the exact figure, ninety-five.

Q : Don't you hire actors and actresses from outside?
A : No, I don't.

Q : How many directors and photographers does your company have?
A : Three or four directors and three photographers.

Q : Where did they get technical training?
A : I trained them.

Q : I saw some boys and girls too. Do you employ girls too?
A : Yes, there are 14 girls on the muster at present.

Q : Are they in permanent service?
A : Yes.

Q : How many movies do you produce in a year?
A : I have already answered this question. 12 to 14, that is about one a month. But I do not like it myself. Only three or four movies should be made in a year. One of them should be the best in all respects.

Q : Have you ever spoken to the exhibitors in the field at present about screening educational films?
A : They are prepared to screen my educational films along with the feature film.

Q : Have you produced any such films?
A : I had produced some industrial short films like *Talegaon Glass Factory*, which the audiences liked very much. Nowadays the producers want movies running to about eight thousand feet. Nobody is interested in short films. Even if the subject of the short film is good and it would bring in money, everyone wants a long movie. I think that short films will be definitely profitable. They will run not only in cities but in villages too.

Q : You had again been to England in 1914. What progress did you find there in the matter of film production?
A : I have all along been using the advanced techniques I found there.

Q : But how do you know it? Do you read the literature on the subject or by some other means?
A : I am a subscriber of the magazines *Moving Pictures*, *The Bioscope* etc. I read them regularly.

Q : Your headquarters are in Nashik. Isn't that so?

A : Yes, the studio is in Nashik while the office is in Mumbai.

Q : How many film producers are there in Nashik?

A : Only one and that is myself.

Q : Why did you prefer Nashik?

A : For one thing, the weather in Nashik is quite suitable for photography. Secondly, the Nashik environs have dense forests, historical places and rivers.

Q : Do you get enough electricity for arc-lights?

A : I have two engines and two dynamos. I produce sufficient electricity for my needs.

Q : Do you ever use arc-lights?

A : Yes, I do.

Q : With what capital did you start the venture?

A : With a capital of fifteen thousand.

Q : Then how did it grow to three lakhs?

A : I will have to ask my colleagues about it.

Q : Did your company produce movies in collaboration with any other company?

A : No.

Q : Did you ask any company?

A : Yes, but no one seems to approve of it.

Q : Why so?

A : Don't know why. Mr Patankar of Mumbai is in this field. I asked him. I also asked Baburao Painter of Kolhapur. He too declined.

Q : Suppose film companies collaborate, will it lead to anything good?

A : Yes.

Q : What good will result?

A : For one thing, a large amount of capital will be formed. Different ideas, artistes, will come together. Suppose I have two or three best actors. Someone else too has some.

If all of them come together, a dozen or more first-rate actors and actresses will be available.

Q : For earning enough profit how much money needs to be expended on a film?
A : Not more than twenty-five thousand.

Q : If a film has to have fascinating scenes, an outfit of expert artistes, how will twenty-five thousand be enough?
A : I don't know about others. I can produce an excellent movie in twenty-five thousand.

Q : Will you be able to earn profit?
A : Definitely.

Q : Now if a movie, which is excellent in all respects, is produced spending a lakh of rupees, will it earn a profit?
A : Impossible.

Q : How can you be so sure?
A : The arithmetic is simple. Our movies have only the Indian market.

Q : Do you mean to say that the Indian market is limited?
A : Yes.

Q : Then what needs to be done to improve the situation?
A : If we produce movies, which will be appreciated in foreign countries too, we shall have a profitable market . The profits will also be high.

Q : How do you say that?
A : For one thing, Indian movies will be liked there as a variety. For another, they are bound to have curiosity about Indian culture, traditions, romance etc.

Q : What size of population should a theatre cater to?
A : About 15 to 20 thousand.

Q : How much will it earn?
A : There will be no loss to be sure.

Q : Do you estimate that in a village with a population of

20,000 a theatre will earn Rs 1,500 per month?

A : Not that much, a little less.

Q : That means there should be a daily earning of Rs 50?

A : Yes, but a film has to pay a daily rent of at least Rs 40.

Q : Is that definite?

A : I am giving an estimate of what can be earned in a village of twenty thousand heads. I think the maximum earning would be a thousand rupees. This means we ought to get twice of what we spend daily.

Q : What do you have to say about the Censor Board at Mumbai? Should there be a more formal Board?

A : Of course.

Q : What are your suggestions in that respect?

A : The Board should have members who know the intricacies of the film industry.

Q : Do you mean to say that the government should help the industry?

A : Yes, the government ought to help this industry.

Q : What sort of help do you expect from the government?

A : It is difficult to say exactly what. But one thing can be said that the government should grant loans on some conditions.

Q : What sort of security should be obtained from the industry so that the government's money will be safe?

A : It is difficult to say off-hand.

Q : Do you think some tax should be reduced or abolished?

A : The tax on chemicals and raw film should be reduced.

Q : Do you see the wall posters and advertisements of movies?

A : Yes, I do.

Q : Do you think they are objectionable? Do they need any restrictions?

A : Of course. Scenes of embracing, romance, kissing etc. should have restrictions.

Q : Should there be special films for children?
A : It is necessary, of course.

Q : Do you think that movies adversely affect children?
A : Not all, but some movies do.

Q : Should children below ten years of age be prohibited from seeing movies?
A : Yes, a strict policy is necessary in respect of some movies.

Q : Is there any danger in making a movie on the battle of Panipat?
A : I don't think so.

Q : Marathas will not be able to see their defeat in that battle. They will not like it.
A : Though it is true and though Marathas had to accept defeat sometimes, the Moguls too had to bite the dust sometimes. Even so, Marathas will not like to see the battle of Panipat.

Q : That means it is dangerous to produce a film on that subject.
A : I don't think so. There will really be no problem if that is done. Yes, there will definitely be some emotional reactions.

Q : Then they will not allow the movie to run.
A : That will not happen. They will see the movie and say while leaving that the movie was worthless.

Q : Do you think that instead of objections being raised later, it would be better to get the story and scenario examined first by the government?
A : I don't think so. The government should preview the movie. That should suffice.

Q : One more point. You said a while earlier that kissing scenes should be cut out. Then how will the movie be popular?

A : There are other good scenes, which the audience likes.

Q : If you show something special on the screen, the common man will say we do not do any such thing.

A : If you ask for my personal opinion, I am not against showing romantic scenes. I am acquainted with foreigners. I know their etiquette. I don't object to kissing. However, it must also be taken into account that when children see such scenes it definitely has an undesirable effect on them.

Q : If the romance in Indian life is shown on the screen here in the western style, will it not be in keeping with the Indian tradition?

A : It is true that Indians do not do romantic acts in the open. Whatever is done is beyond public gaze. If it is shown overtly, how will Indians like it? That must also be considered.

The same year, 1927, Mr Siraj Ali of the Famous Cine Laboratory, Mumbai, had an interview with Dadasaheb. It was published in Arabic in a newspaper of Arabastan (Saudi Arabia).

19

PHALKE'S INTERVIEW WITH REPRESENTATIVE OF *KESARI*

After *Raja Harishchandra* was screened at Surat, it was exhibited at the Baliwala Theatre in Bhawani Peth of Pune in the second week of August. Dadasaheb Phalke attended the inauguration. A representative of *Kesari* of Lokmanya Tilak was sent to interview Phalke. The interview was published in the issue of *Kesari* dated 19th August 1913. A portion of it has been reproduced in an earlier chapter. The remainder is given below.

Q : You must have confronted a lot of difficulties to obtain the capital for this first movie?

A : Not much. I could get the capital. This was a good omen more for this indigenous industry than for myself.

Q : You must have acquired the knowledge of the techniques and the machinery by reading about it. But what did you have to do for its actual use, for getting the confidence to use it?

A : For acquiring the practical knowledge, I went abroad. It was possible to get it only there. I went to England for the purpose. When buying the machinery, I came to know many things. Every salesman explained in detail and with due care, how to use the machinery. There was a lot of machinery of every type. After explaining everything, the salesman would tell me, 'In respect of durability, utility and ease of handling, this is better than any other machinery of this type. Moreover, the price is reasonable'. For explaining how to use it, they had to spend a lot of time, but they never excused themselves. They would give all information with a smile, unreservedly.

Q : That's about the machinery. But how did you get the knowledge about the various aspects of movie making?

A : I was fortunate in that respect. In London, nobody was allowed to watch movie production, but it was possible for me to do so due to the courtesy of a renowned producer in the vicinity of London. Mr Kepburn, editor of the cine-periodical *Bioscope*, obliged me in that respect. In our very first meeting, he formed a very good opinion about me. He telephoned a producer, Cecil Hepworth, to offer me complete co-operation and that gave me the opportunity.

Q : How big is the cinema industry?

A : Movies are produced in America, France, Germany and England. Edison is considered the pioneer of cinema industry. Although movies were produced to a large extent in America, the credit for it does not belong to Edison. The mention of Pathe company of France must be made in particular. Many of the foreign movies imported into India are made in France. The number of Pathe movies screened all over the world today is about fifty thousand. In London there are 500 cinema houses. The work of production of movies goes on systematically there. Very few institutions produce costly movies. Once a movie is completed, copies are made according to the demand. All that an exhibitor needs is a projector and a small generator for producing electricity. There are many such exhibitors there.

Q : Why don't you distribute your own movies? And in future too, is it your intention to produce only movies?

A : Naturally. However, my aim is to provide variety and something special. As for distribution, will it be proper for a writer to become a bookseller? It will be entirely wrong for me to be a distributor of my films. The extent of the toil and trouble of filmmaking is so vast that my whole life will be insufficient for production alone. Even if I produce two or three movies a week, I will get distributors. Presently I have only one movie. It is already screened in Mumbai and Surat. After the screening in Pune is over, *Raja Harishchandra* will be screened at Colombo, Rangoon and then Calcutta. Their dates are also fixed.

Q : On which subjects would you like to produce movies?

A : I wish to produce movies on a variety of subjects. At present I intend to make movies on some episodes from old Sanskrit plays and on the basis of the present Marathi plays. I would like my movies to depict the religious observances of different provinces, festivals, traditions, holy places, first-rate humour, dress styles etc. Moreover, I also have the intention of making movies on scientific and educational subjects. My artiste assistants are all novices. After considering the quality of my movie, I feel confident that I can produce works of art equal in quality to foreign movies and the audiences would definitely like such movies. Movies are a medium of entertainment. Besides, they can also provide education for the masses, help spread of knowledge and acquaint people with the real Indian culture. I have many subjects in my mind for that purpose.

20

EPILOGUE

Dhundiraj Govind alias Dadasaheb Phalke's extraordinary artistic qualities are apparent every now and then. Besides, the hardships and the financial worries that he had to suffer were also boundless. It is said that his drawbacks like impracticality, lack of foresight, obstinacy, quick temper and tongue-lashing were responsible for his problems. He never thought of the adverse consequences of his behaviour. It is a fact that this was the cause of the tragic end to the life of this great artist. His enviable worldly success notwithstanding, he was forever far from financial prosperity.

However, innumerable artists, who considered their goal as the raison d'être of their existence, who dedicated their life to it, had to meet the same fate. They were honoured, felicitated, their fame survived them, yet they had to go through the fire of adverse circumstances. They had no regrets for it themselves, but their family had to suffer, along with them, the multiple fangs of misfortune. What about them? If we consider the lives of artists, patriots, and social reformers who were selfless, principled, restless and unconcerned with creature comforts, what else do we find? If Dadasaheb had shown some skill in dealing with the problems of practical living, a little spirit of accommodation, an attitude of compromise, if he had curbed his obstinate, hotheaded nature, he would not only have had a lot more dazzling achievements, but he and his family members would have had at least the minimum comforts as well. But who can change the innate nature and attitude of man?

Even allowing for these defects in his nature, how does one evaluate the great work he did in his declining years, in penury, making the cinema industry indigenous? Today, the Qutub Minar of Indian cinema stands tall. Thousands have found in cinema a source of livelihood. What is more, it ranks second among the industries in India. Although the government has not yet recognised it as an 'industry', it has been No.1 producer of movies in the world for the last 24 years. What is the bedrock of this achievement? It is Dadasaheb Phalke's incomparable sacrifice! The cinema industry must always feel beholden to him. Adversities, difficulties, problems, humiliation, ridicule, indifference always buffeted him from all sides. Yet he never for once deviated from his chosen path, never caved in, never lost his verve. He never hankered after publicity. If he wanted, he could easily have had it. But achievement of his goal was everything to him.

Dadasaheb was emotional too. When an artist-technician like Nanasaheb Sarpotdar who was knowledgeable in the various aspects of filmmaking, died prematurely, Dadasaheb was seventy. In the letter he wrote to Nanasaheb's family, he said that if he had passed away and Nanasaheb had lived, how much better it would have been.

The Nashik *Mahanagarpalika* (Municipal Corporation) has taken in hand a project for a memorial to Dadasaheb Phalke and work on it is starting immediately. This grand memorial will come up in the vicinity of Pandav Leni, a historic landmark. A state-wide competition was launched for its blue-print. The government has donated seven hectares of land. The *Mahanagarpalika* has gone ahead without waiting for financial help from the government. The plan is not to restrict the memorial to Dadasaheb Phalke's statue but to make it a tourist attraction.

A magnificent arch of sculptures is going to be erected on the Mumbai-Agra road. The memorial project includes an exhibition hall, drawings of historic models connected with the Indian cinema, a large-scale photo-library for preserving the history of cinema using modern techniques, a swimming pool, *Appu Ghar,* toys for children, an extensive forest park etc.

Dadasaheb Phalke's peerless, phenomenal work of building up the Indian cinema industry has been compared with that of Lumiere Brothers of France, Georges Melies, Russia's Siergei Isestin, Pudovkin, Germany's George Wagner, Ernst Lubitsch, Robert Wiene, Britain's David Lean, Zucker, America's Edwin Porter and David Griffith and the Father of Indian Cinema has been included among the worldwide epochal men of the cinema industry. We bow to him who achieved such worldwide recognition.

Appendix-I

Milestones in Dadasaheb Phalke's Life

1870	Born at Triambakeshwar, Nashik district, on 30th April at 8:30 P.M.
1885	Education up to matriculation completed at Maratha High School, Mumbai.
1886	Passed First Grade examination of J. J. School of Art. Married a girl from Marathe family.
1886-89	Studied drawing, painting, modelling and photography at Prof Gajjar's Kala Bhavan at Baroda.
1890	Bought a steel camera from scholarship money.
1891	Acquired the know-how of making half-tone blocks, tri-colour printing on photo-litho press, and ceramics photography under the guidance of P. Baburao Walavalkar of Ratlam State.
1892	Worked for some time in the Kala Bhavan studio given in his charge by Prof Gajjar for gaining experience. Thereafter started independent business of photography at Godhra.
1900	First wife died in plague epidemic. Godhra business closed.
1901	Training from a German magician at Baroda in various tricks. Held public magic shows under the name 'Prof Kelfa'.
1902	Second marriage at Baroda with Saraswati, daughter of Shankar Vasudeo Karandikar.
1902-05	Worked for three years as a draftsman in the department of archaeology of the government of India. Toured throughout India for photographing and sketching underground ancient cities. Got to see many ancient sculptures.
1906-08	Resignation from government service due to the

movement against the partition of Bengal and start of independent business at Lonavla under the name and style of 'Phalke's Art and Printing Works'.

1909 Sheth Purushottam Vishram Mavji, a financier, provided capital for expansion of the business. According to the agreement, 'Phalke's Art and Printing Works' changed its name to 'Laxmi Art Printing Works' and it became a partnership business. Departure for Germany for buying machinery for colour printing and obtaining technical know-how. On return, started working day and night. Also started a very artistic, illustrated magazine, *Suvarnamala* in Marathi and Gujarati.

1910 Left 'Laxmi Art' without taking any share due to him because of differences on principles with the partner. Considering Phalke's extreme need, the Sethji requested him to take the reins of the business again in his hands, but he refused in no uncertain terms. Due to the overwork in the Press, there was tremendous strain on his eyes and he lost his sight. The care taken by the eye-surgeon Dr Prabhakar and Saraswatibai's nursing, helped regain his sight.

1911 On viewing the movie *Life of Christ* on April 15, firmly resolved to make the cinema industry indigenous, notwithstanding his poor financial circumstances. Due to the continuous experiments undertaken for that purpose, lost his sight again. Dr Prabhakar did his best and restored Dadasaheb's sight. Immediately on recovery, he restarted his efforts to achieve his goal.

1912 For the purpose of obtaining the mechanical and technical knowledge and for buying the essential machinery, obtained a loan of Rs 10,000 from Yashvantrao Nadkarni on the security of a life insurance policy of Rs 12,000. Left for London on 1st February. The first Indian child artiste Mandakini was borne on 3rd February. Returned after placing an order for a camera, a printing machine, a perforating machine for film and some raw film. Founded 'Phalke Films' on 1st April. All the machinery and the raw film arrived in Mumbai harbour in May. In June-July, successful production of the short film *Growth of a Plant*, which brought offers of capital for him.

1913 After overcoming innumerable difficulties and misfortunes, the first Indian movie, *Raja Harishchandra* was screened at the Coronation Theatre, Mumbai, on 3rd May. Running for 23 days continuously in one theatre, this first Indian movie created a record. For the sake of convenience, 'Phalke Films' moved from Mumbai to Nashik on 2nd October for movie production.

1914 *Mohini Bhasmasur* screened at the Olympia Theatre, Mumbai, on 2nd January. Kamlabai Gokhale and Durgabai Kamat, two female artistes, seen on the Indian screen for the first time. *Satyavan Savitri*, Dadasaheb's third movie, was screened on 6th June. He left for London on 1st August with his three movies. Viewing them, cinema critics and knowledgeable persons in the field in London were amazed. Received tempting offers from local producers to undertake film production in England, but politely rejected all of them. The First World War having started, the imagined fear in India about its consequences made it impossible to arrange for finance. Most difficult situation.

1917 After spending two and a half years in the most trying circumstances, Dadasaheb screened *Lankadahan* on 19th September. Due to the unprecedented success of this movie, the cinema industry took root in India. Dadasaheb made plenty of money, which was spent in repaying the loan. Lokmanya Tilak and Dadasaheb Khaparde visited his studio.

1918 With five moneybags as partners, Hindusthan Film Company was formed on 1st January. *Shrikrishna Janma* was presented on 24th August.

1919 *Kaliamardan*, with Mandakini Phalke's role as Shrikrishna, was exhibited on 3rd May. Both the movies were highly popular. However, due to sharp differences with the business-minded partners, Dadasaheb left the company towards the end of the year and announced his retirement.

1920 Left for Banaras with the whole family. He scripted a seven-act play *Rangbhoomi* at that place. Also at Banaras, Lokmanya's last visit took place. Lokmanya had tried to get capital for Dadasaheb three years earlier.

1921 First meeting with Kalamaharshi Baburao Painter at Kolhapur.

1922 *Rangbhoomi* play was staged at Mumbai, Pune and Nashik but was a total failure. Dadasaheb again in debt.

1923 Reconciliation with the partners of Hindusthan Cinema Film Company and Dadasaheb's appointment as director, chief of production and technical advisor on a salary of Rs 1000 per month.

1926 Presidentship of the *Natyasammelan* at Kolhapur on July 18.

1927 Testimony in Delhi before the Indian Cinematograph Committee appointed by the British government.

1933 'Phalke's Enamel Works' founded. His products received a prize at the Industrial Exhibition.

1934 The silent movie *Setubandhan* screened with addition of sound.

1937 The only talkie directed by Dadasaheb Phalke, namely, *Gangavataran*, screened on 6th August at Royal Opera House in Mumbai.

1938 Living on the pension received from Prabhat Film Company.

1939 The Silver Jubilee of the Indian cinema celebrated in May in Mumbai. Phalke was the chief guest. The cinema industry offered him a purse. On 25th December delivered a speech on the radio addressed to film producers, making important suggestions.

1940 On the urging of cine-producers of Madras, visited Madras on 23rd July along with wife. Visited the Indian Chamber of Commerce of Calcutta. Felicitation ceremony held by the weekly *Deepali*.

1942 Started living in his own house 'Hindcinejanakashram'. Vishnupant Damle of 'Prabhat' bought his story *Japani Pankha* for Rs 2000.

1943 Suffered from diabetes and amnesia.

1944 Applied to the central government on 26th January for a licence for film production. Showed a keen desire once more to make movies. The government's reply rejecting his application received on 14th February. Died on 16th February at the age of 74.

Appendix-II

Movies Directed By Phalke

Phalke Films

1. Raja Harishchandra
2. Mohini Bhasmasur
3. Satyavan Savitri
4. Truthful Raja Harischandra
5. Lankadahan

Hindusthan Cinema Film Company

6. Shrikrishna Janma
7. Kaliamardan
8. Sant Namdeo
9. Killing of Jarasandh
10. Mahananda
11. Babhruvahan
12. Killing of Shishupal
13. Ashvatthama
14. Buddhadeo
15. Gora Kumbhar
16. Guru Dronacharya
17. Daughters For Sale OR Sharda
18. Tattle-tale Narad OR the War of Ram and Maruti
19. Shivaji's Escape from Agra
20. Municipal Elections
21. Syamantak Mani
22. Killing of Hidimba and Bakasur
23. A Stinging Eye-opener for Kakasaheb
24. Crescent Moon
25. Satyabhama
26. Sant Eknath

27. Janaki Swayamwar
28. Bhakta Prahlad
29. Bajaji Nimbalkar
30. Rukmangad Mohini
31. Nal Damayanti
32. Birth of Hanuman
33. The Doffing of Draupadi's Sarees
34. Bhakta Sudama
35. The Hijacking of Rukmini
36. Shrikrishna's Diplomacy
37. Parshuram
38. Bhakta Damaji
39. Malavika Agnimitra
40. Chandrahas
41. Vasantsena
42. A Talking Pot
43. Sant Mirabai
44. Kacha Devayani
45. Malati Madhav
46. War of Ram and Ravan
47. Sant Janabai
48. Killing of Shatmukhi Ravan
49. Victory of Ram's Rule
50. Sudarshan
51. Kabir Kamaal
52. Setubandhan (All silent movies)

Kolhapur Cinetone

53. The Ganga Descends to Earth (Talkie)

Phalke's Short Films

1. Growth of a Plant
2. Fun with Matchsticks
3. Paws of Flour (Hand Prints)
4. Scenes of the Godavari River
5. The 'Affairs' of Smoking
6. The Glass Factory of Talegaon
7. Laxmi's Carpet
8. Sanlagna Ras

9. Enjoyment of Dreams
10. Prof Kelfa’s Magic Show
11. Festival of Kartiki Pournima
12. Dhandal Bhatji’s Bath in the Ganga
13. How Movies Are Made
14. Great Festival of Sinhastha
15. Good Fortune of Gadganjrav
16. Ahmedabad Congress
17. Patwardhan’s Royal Circus
18. 37th Session of the Congress at Gaya
19. Enchanting Scenes of Buddha Gaya
20. Ganesh Festival
21. Cave Sculptures of Verul
22. A Strange Sculpture
23. Well Punished
24. Breaking of a Promise
25. Khandala Ghat
26. Cattle Pound of Nashik
27. Religious Purification of Miss Miller
28. Outdoor Masculine Sports of Pune
29. A Week with Lokmanya Tilak
30. Scorpion’s Sting

Notes

1. *The Times of India* gave pre-screening publicity as follows: '*Raja Harishchandra* is a most thrilling story from Indian mythology. Harishchandra was a great king of India, who flourished several centuries before the Christian era. He (sic) and his wife's names were household words in every Indian home for their truthfulness and chastity respectively. Their son Rohidas was a marvellous type of noble manhood. What Job was in Christian (sic) Bible, so Harischandra was in the Indian mythology. The patience of this king was tried so much that he was reduced to utter poverty and he had to pass his days in jungles in the company of cruel beasts. The same fate overcame his faithful wife and the dutiful son. But truth triumphed at last and they came out successfully through the ordeal. Several Indian scenes as depicted in this film are simply marvellous. It is really a pleasure to see this piece of Indian workmanship'.
2. *The Bombay Chronicle*, while reviewing *Raja Harishchandra* in its issue of Monday, 5th May 1913 said, 'An interesting departure is made this week by the management of Coronation Cinematographer. The first great Indian dramatic film on the lines of the great epics of the western world ... it is curious that the first experiment in this direction was so long in coming (sic) ... all the stories of Indian mythology era will long make their appearance ... followed by representations of modern dramas and comedies, another field which opens up vast possibilities ... it is to Mr Phalke that Bombay owes this ... the result of his first effort exceeds one's exceptions (sic) ... it is a remarkable triumph for this film, from a technical viewpoint there are some imperfections, as Mr Phalke will probably admit ... this wonderful drama is splendidly

represented by the company of actors selected by Mr Phalke ... the film was witnessed by a large crowd (sic) on Saturday night on whom it evidently made a great impression and we have no doubt that the Coronation will have crowded houses throughout the week. One can freely praise the beauty and ingenuity with which he (Phalke) has succeeded in presenting effectively the most difficult scences (sic)'.

3. In the issue of *The Bombay Chronicle* dated 12th January 1914, the following review was published on *Mohini-Bhasmasur*: 'The Coronation Cinema has this week, full one and a half hours swadeshi programme. *Mohini*'s almost romantic and charming (sic) Pauranik drama which drew crowded houses at the Olympia (sic) in the previous week is a chief attraction this week at this enterprising theatre. In this film we see ... 'hand print' is an interesting swadeshi comic (sic) film and the *Godavari Views* (scenes at Nashik, Triambakeshwar; an informative documentary) another film by Mr Phalke, were highly appreciated. Mr Phalke is the pioneer of swadeshi film manufacturing in India and a visit to the Coronation (sic) cinema this week will give an idea of his successful enterprise'.

4. The extent of affection and confidence Mr Kepburn had for Dadasaheb is apparent from his articles in the issues of *The Bioscope* dated 28th May 1914 and 4th June. An excerpt from the 28th May issue:

   'No subjects dealing with Indian romance and mythology have as yet been presented in this country on the screen. Some two years ago Mr D. G. Phalke, a well-known artist of Bombay came over to this country and studied the moving picture industry in every phase and in this connection he acknowledges in very warm terms his indebtedness to, among others, Mr Cecil Hepworth, who invited him to Walton and gave him much valuable advice and information. Upon his return to India Mr Phalke who took back with him considerable plant, found that he had very different conditions to contend with, owing in great measure to the hot climate and the difficulty of securing the services of suitable artists, operators and other requisites for the different equipment of his enterprise. However by diligent study and perseverance each obstacle was gradually surmounted and eventually in April 1913 his first drama *Harischandra* was produced and met very considerable favour. Mr Phalke has since screened another drama entitled *Mohini* and very shortly a third one (sic) is to be placed to his credit, bearing the title *Nala-Damayanti* which has been produced at a very considerable cost. These subjects have been taken from Indian mythology in which Mr Phalke intends to specialise in many of his future productions'.

In the very next issue of the weekly dated 4th June 1914, Mr Kepburn wrote as follows: 'Since one of the greatest and most valuable possibilities of the cinematograph is the circulation throughout the world of plays dealing with national life and characteristics, acted by motive (sic) (native?) players amidst local scenes, it is with no small interest that one awaits the appearance in this country of Mr D. G. Phalke's first Indian films some details of which were given in last week's *Bioscope*. In spite of its wonderfully beautiful and distinctive qualities, Indian mythology is practically unknown in this country with the exception of a few stories which have reached us through rather inadequate translations, and one feels, therefore, that Mr Phalke is directing his energies in the best and the most profitable direction in specialising upon the presentation by film of Indian mythological dramas. In a film version of a story, the whole beauty of the original may be retained so far as its action and characterisation are concerned, whilst it is possible to realise local colour and scenic detail in a manner, which would be quite out of the question in any purely literary form, or even in the most lavish production. One feels, in short, that the cinematograph is the ideal medium for the presentation of all such stories, in which, if they are to be fully understood and sympathised with by foreigners, vivid realism of atmosphere and setting are essential considerations.

Mr Phalke's first film *Harischandra* was received with the greatest enthusiasm in India, the leading Bombay newspapers having reviewed it very favourably and (at) considerable length'.

5. On the occasion of the silver jubilee of the Indian cinema, the English cine-periodical *The Moving Pictures* said about *Lankadahan*: '1917 is the most important year in the Indian

film industry for during the year, Phalke's *Lankadahan* was released. It created quite a furor (sic) wherever (sic) it was exhibited. Till this picture was released Mr Phalke had produced more than twenty films. Twenty two exactly. (This might include documentaries, informative films, travel films, topical, industrial and technological and other short films.) The phenomenal success of *Lankadahan* decided the fate of the films as business proposition. It proved that films as business had come to stay in India. It will not be far from truth to say that *Lanka Dahan* once for all demonstrated to the sceptic public the potentials of the new business. The phenomenal success this business achieved was not a little responsible for the floating of more film producing concerns in India and particularly Bombay'.

6. In 1939 the silver jubilee of the Indian Cinema was celebrated. On that occasion Dadasaheb gave expression to his anguish in the *Sunday Times* as follows. About the changeover of Phalke Films into Hindusthan Film Cinema Company, he said: 'Though I went on producing films, it proved a most uneventful career for me, owing to many reasons. And for full 15 years following 1918 I led practically an empty life in the film production. This long spell broke with the appearance of *Setu Bandhan* a synchronised picture in 1933, and with *Gangavataran* for Kolhapur Cinetone. I cried a halt and quit (sic) the field two years ago'.
7. As a rule Gandhi gives messages only on rare occasions and these only for causes whose virtue is ever undoubtful. As for cinema industry he has the least interest in it and one may not expect a word of appreciation from him.
8. During his last days he suffered from amnesia. I had once casually come to my parents' home, taking my daughter with me. After I returned, the next day he kept talking with his granddaughter as if she were sitting in front of him. I was very sad to see it. What an enterprising Dada of bygone days and what is he reduced to now! Later his amnesia had improved quite a lot. Mai said in an interview to an English periodical, 'Even on the death bed, Dadasaheb remained mentally alert. Despite loss of memory, his dreams and aspirations, his zeal for pursuing new pastures, fresh avenues had not forsaken him. 'I have big plans and dreams in my

mind, there is so much to do' he was saying'.

9. Dada was a voracious reader. A representative of the famous newspaper of Madras, *The Hindu*, had been to us. He wrote about Dada, 'When I entered his room, Sherlock Holmes and Shakespeare were lying hand in hand. Webster was also sitting besides (sic) him'.

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Dadasaheb Phalke was obsessed with the idea of making the Indian cinema industry indigenous, when he was already past forty and poverty-stricken. Ultimately he translated into reality what seemed impossible. In order to produce movies with a specific ideal, he exerted himself, fought against adverse circumstances and put his family life on the line. Yet this disregarded the Father of Indian Cinema died in penury. The Government of India, however, appreciated his monumental work and instituted an award in his name—*Phalke Puraskar*—from the centenary year of his birth (1970) to be presented to an artist who makes an extensive and notable contribution to the world of Indian cinema. It is deemed to be the supreme honour in the world of cinema in India.

The biographer, **Shri Bapu Watve**, is a well-known writer on subjects relating to cinema, a public speaker and a studious researcher.

Shri S.A. Virkar is a prolific translator for Marathi to English.

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